

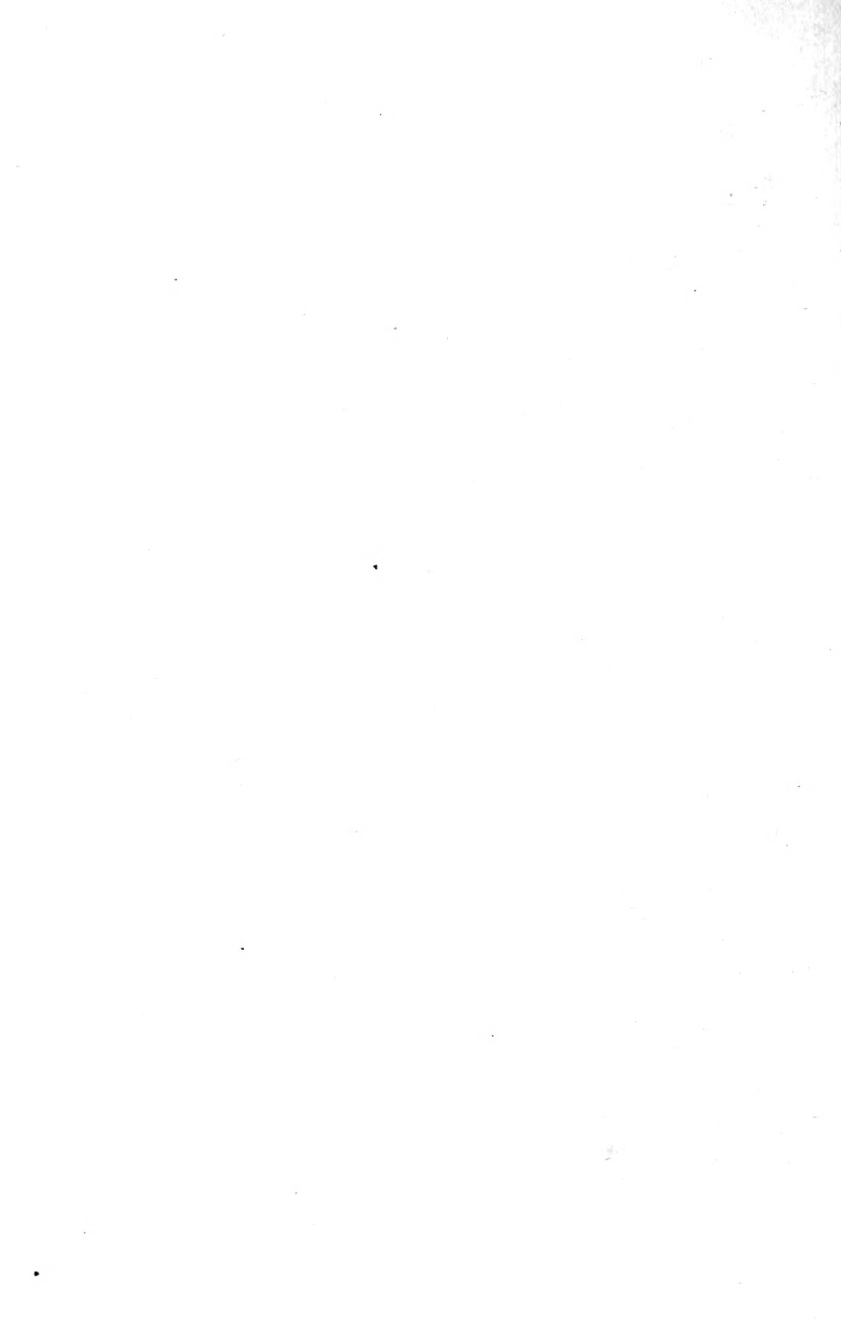


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HER DIGNITY AND GRACE.

VOL. III.

HER DIGNITY AND GRACE.

A Tale.

BY

H. C.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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HER DIGNITY AND GRACE.

CHAPTER I.

ANN'S TRAVESTIE.

“MY grandmother’s want of health gave us great anxiety. She grew more and more feeble, and finally she closed her eyes in sleep on the sofa one evening, never to awake again.

“After her death it was settled that Becklea was to be considered my permanent residence ; my grandfather found it so lonely without me. My father and stepmother were constantly coming there also ; she was a great favourite of my grandfather’s, she was cheerful and agreeable in conversation, and could talk over old stories with him, for he knew all her relations and connections.

“But the shock of my grandmother’s death, which was sudden, although she had been ailing some time, affected him very much. He seemed to forget she was gone, sometimes asking, when he woke up from his nap in the afternoon, where she was, or addressing her as if she were still in the room. We tried in every possible way to amuse him. He liked the house to be full of company, which assisted us very much; we found that almost childish things sufficed, and if anything—a game, or what not—diverted him once, he was quite willing to have it repeated.

“Dear old man! he sat in his arm-chair with his deep mourning suit of black velvet and silk, looking so complacent. He seldom went out, even in the coach with me, and never without me; but he liked me to go out both driving and riding, and to parties with my stepmother, my father remaining with him; and when I came home he listened with pleasure to the recital of all I had seen and done.

“This was a happy time for me, but I missed my dear grandmother sadly. I felt there was always something wanting. The receptions

were not the same; there was a formality and coldness about them; they wanted my grandmother's geniality and courtesy. Then, I felt so small and insignificant sitting at the head of the table, after her stateliness, and grander proportions.

"I was very fond of 'dressing up' and mimicry. One day I made a bet of twopence with one of my companions that I would walk past the Becklea almshouses and through the village as old Mary Robins, one of the almshouse women, of peculiar gait and appearance, and that no one should find out it was not old Mary herself.

"I was much perplexed, however, when, on thinking how this bet was to be accomplished, I had not remembered that the almshouse dress was necessary; for they were never seen without it. I consulted Pinfold, who was now my tire-woman. She had been accustomed to look after the dress of the old women, and to order it, in my grandmother's name, from the maker in York. She therefore ordered a full suit, which she said would be soon wanted; and when it

arrived, with very little alteration, it fitted me well.

“I had to take one of the lodge-keepers into my confidence, not only to take old Mary away for a couple of hours, but to help me dress in her lodge. Pinfold and I managed all very well, and I set off on my limping journey. I passed along the almshouses, and even spoke to one of the old men, unrecognized; then on to the village; walked through it, and into a shop, where I bought a handkerchief, saying I had a very bad cold.

“The woman assisted me, saying, ‘I think this is your pattern,’ and showed me a spotted one.

“‘Yes, and thank ye kindly,’ I said, and left the shop.

“I had gained my bet, but had not so much fun in it as I expected, owing to my fear of being discovered; and I afterwards heard that the shopwoman had remarked I was ‘not so chatty as Mary Robins was wont to be,’ though she never suspected the trick.

“My grandfather was angry with me for

making a bet, though only for twopence ; for it was not a proper thing for a lady to do. Nevertheless, he laughed heartily when I gave him the details of my adventure.

“Some months after, finding that he wanted a little excitement, and there was no one at Becklea but my stepmother and I, I took Pinfold again into my confidence, and we arranged that I should dress up again as an almshouse woman, and make up a story to divert my grandfather, though I had not the smallest hope but that he would instantly detect me, and the game be spoiled. I could depend on my stepmother's prudence if she discovered me.

“The powdering-room was out of the great hall, under the minstrel's gallery. It was a square room destitute of furniture, except one chair that always stood in the centre of the room ; a very small table at one end, on which was placed a hand-glass ; and a long looking-glass on the wall that reached from ceiling to floor. Two large cupboards were in the room : in one was kept the powdering cloaks and masks, and the powder and pomatum ; the

other was empty, save two shelves, and was very much the larger of the two.

“Except at the time for powdering the heads of my grandfather and his guests, this room was never used. I never wore powder, except at Court, when it was necessary.

“It was agreed that I should dress and re-dress in this room, that no one might see me in my transit from upstairs to the library, where my grandfather sat. I was again to personate old Mary Robins, known to be the most eccentric and quarrelsome of the inmates of the almshouses.

“Everything went on well ; I dressed without being disturbed, and Pinfold went in with her story of my pertinacity in wishing to speak with his Lordship himself.

“His Lordship was inclined to be angry. He said old Mary was the most exacting of mortals, and the most ugly. She had been spoiled in her long service in the family, and expected to be master over everybody, as she was in the kitchen at Becklea. My stepmother pleaded for her, and he said Pinfold might show

the old woman in, and wait for her in the corridor.

“I entered, limping like her, with the back of my hand resting on my left hip (after old Mary’s fashion), and made a bob curtsey at the door, where I stood. My face was bound up, so that, with the wide frill of my cap, the greater portion of it was hidden ; and the part seen I had painted brown and wrinkled. In my hand I held the handkerchief I bought on my former adventure, with my stick ; and my hands too I had painted.

“‘Well, Mary,’ said my grandfather, ‘and what do you want now?’

“‘Please, your Lordship,’ I said, in a doleful tone, ‘I’m so thronged wi’ they raats, they a’most eat me out of house and home like.’

“‘Set a trap, Mary ; set a trap and catch them.’

“‘Traps be no good, my Lord ; they be that artful, they knows I want to ketch ’em.’

“‘Nonsense, Mary, nonsense.’

“‘Eh, my Lord ! if ye’d only see how they scrabble away when they see I.’

“ ‘I am not surprised, Mary ; I think I should scabble away too if you had that stick. Get a cat, Mary, get a cat.’

“ ‘Get a caat, my Lord ! why sure it’s the caats I’m come to your Lordship about.’

“ ‘You told me it was about the rats.’

“ ‘Eh, my Lord ! the caats and the raats they be so owdacious, they be six of the one and half a dozen of t’other.’

“ ‘Come, Mary,’ said my grandfather, laughing, ‘what is it you want ?’

“ ‘Want, my Lord ?’ with a deep sigh ; ‘want’s become my master.’

“ ‘Never mind, I dare say I can relieve your wants if you will only tell me what they are.’

“ ‘My Lord,’ I said, with many deep sighs, ‘I want a many things.’

“ ‘Speak out, Mary,’ said my grandfather, bringing his fist loudly down on the table, ‘speak out.’

“ ‘Cr-r-r-eee,’ I cried, in the old woman’s way, somewhat between a scream and a croak, pretending to cry violently, and rattling my stick and my clogs on the polished oak floor.

“ ‘What’s the matter, woman? are you crazy?’ ”

“ ‘Please, your Lordship, no; but I’m so mazed like, my Lord,’ I said, sobbing loudly, ‘saving your presence, my Lord and madam, I can’t help snobbin’.’ ”

“ ‘You put me out of all patience, Mary. Tell me at once what it is you want.’ ”

“ ‘Please, your Lordship, it’s John Vass and his Betty.’ ”

“ ‘John Vass and his wife? Why you told me it was the rats, then the cats. What do you mean?’ ”

“ ‘Please, your Lordship, the Vasses has the caatses, and they do worrit me out o’ my life.’ ”

“ ‘Well, what can I do?’ ”

“ ‘Why, my Lord, it’s Richard Bowman’s dog. He barks so furious; and atween ’em all they’ve broken my railing. Will your Lordship please give me an order to have it mended?’ ”

“ ‘What does it want done to it?’ ”

“ ‘Certintly, my Lord, it wants three or two naails in it.’ ”

“ ‘Is that all?’ said my grandfather, laughing. ‘This is much ado about nothing.’ ”

“ ‘ Well, my Lord, it may want six or five, I can’t say, to be safe.’

“ ‘ Is there anything else, Mary ?’

“ ‘ My Lord,’ I said, whimpering, ‘ there’s my poor Willum’s gravestone.’

“ ‘ What about that ? Is it not set up rightly ?’

“ ‘ Oh, my Lord, they wicked fellers has been and put him wrong.’

“ ‘ How do you mean ?’

“ ‘ You know, my Lord, he wasn’t, to say, old.’

“ ‘ Pretty well, Mary ; he was not far from seventy.’

“ ‘ Nay, my Lord, asking your Lordship’s pardon, and your’s, madam, he wasn’t althegither seventy ; but they wicked fellers has put him down ninety-six.’

“ ‘ Ninety six ?’

“ ‘ Yes, my Lord.’

“ ‘ Oh, Mary,’ said my stepmother, ‘ it was not so when I saw the tombstone. I should have remarked it, had it been so.’

“ ‘ Ah, madam !’ I said, with a deep sigh and shaking my head.

“ ‘ I do not think it is possible,’ said my grand-

father; 'for Earnshaw wrote out the whole inscription himself, and he would not make such a mistake.'

" ' Ah, my Lord, I would not make so bold to understand your Lordship's words; I don't know what the deception be, but I know when ye look down over the headstone there's ninety-six as plain as A B C.'

" ' Ha, ha, ha, Mary; what a foolish old woman you are. Ha, ha, ha.' And my stepmother laughed too.

" ' So then, Mary, he was sixty-nine years old.'

" ' Yes, my Lord, and two months; but that's not writ down on the stone; they's the wickedest fellers on airth, they be.'

" ' Go and look on the other side, read it straight down from beginning to end, and you will see the age sixty-nine is put quite right.'

" ' They make it look so to please your Lordship; but look down, my Lord, over, and ye'll see the craft o' their ways.'

" ' Come here, Mary. Now look at this;' and he showed her the sixty-nine he had written

down in large figures. ‘You read it backwards, you see, and upside down.’

“ ‘Your Lordship is very clever,’ I said, shaking my head; ‘I can’t take to it like your Lordship.’ Then after a pause I added, ‘But if your Lordship would please write me an order for the fence and the naails.’ I suggested this, making a curtsy, being rather frightened lest the proximity to the table might lead to my discovery; so I moved a little further off.

“ ‘What am I to write, Mary?’

“ ‘Please my Lord, will ye say that Chips may give me eight or seven naailses, and come and mend the fence for me. If so be there was one or two over, I’d keep ’em honest, my Lord, till next time, and it’s handy to have a naail or so.’

“ ‘Yes, Mary, I know you would be honest over even the trifle of a nail; but Chips will think it strange that I should write an order for such a trifle. I never write an order for anything. You can do without that ceremony.’

“ ‘No, please, your Lordship, and axing your pardon, ye don’t know them Chipses; for the

likes o' me the sentinery of a order be what is wanted.'

" 'You are full of crotchets, Mary.' Then, giving her a written paper, 'What else do you want?'

" 'A mouse-trap, please, your Lordship. Will ye please write me an order for a mouse-trap?'

" 'Oh, nonsense, Mary,' he said, laughing, 'this is too much. I can't write an order for a mouse-trap. Whom is the order to be for?'

" 'For me, my Lord,' I said, with a curtsy.

" 'Yes; but whom is the order to be written upon?'

" 'On the paper, please, my Lord'—another curtsy.

" 'Tut, pshaw,' said my grandfather, with a thump on the table with his fist. 'What shop-man's name am I to put?'

" 'Any ye please, my Lord,' I said, with much trembling and shaking, and another curtsy. 'I dare say they'll any of 'em trust your Lordship.'

" 'Really, Mary,' said my stepmother, 'you can buy one for yourself without giving all this trouble.'

“ ‘Eh, madam ! but his Lordship gives us all our furniture for the houses.’

“ ‘Do you call a mouse-trap furniture ?’ said my stepmother ; but my grandfather motioned to her to say no more.

“ ‘Well, Mary, I must know how much this mouse-trap will cost before I run into a debt like this.’

“ ‘Fourpence farden, my Lord.’

“ ‘I had better give you the money, and you can buy it for yourself.’

“ ‘Oh, my Lord, please don’t.’

“ ‘Yes, here is the money, fourpence halfpenny ; you must owe me the farthing.’

“ ‘Certintly, my Lord, if you wish it ; but ye’ll please give me the order all the same.’

“ ‘I really cannot.’

“ ‘Eh, my Lord ! or I couldn’t get it.’

“ ‘Well, here it is,’ he said, laughing, and writing on a slip of paper ; ‘and now go home, Mary, I have no more time to lose.’

“ I took the two papers and the money, which he had wrapped up in a piece of blotting-paper ; made more curtseys, wishing them good evening

with humble thanks, and hobbled out of the room with as much noise as possible. Pinfold was at the door, and we hurried to the powdering-room for me to re-dress. I put on my walking-dress, putting my money and papers into my pocket, and walked round the house, passing the library windows. My grandfather saw me, and made signs for me to come in.

“Then they repeated to me all the conversation, both laughing heartily at the absurdity of ‘that troublesome old woman.’ My grandfather ended by saying that Chips would be so annoyed at the order she had extorted from him, that he should send for him to explain matters, and got up to go out of the room.

“I feared this was going too far, so I drew the papers and money out of my pocket, and said to him, ‘Oh, sir, what is this? Did you not say I owed you a farthing?’ He looked astonished and denied it. Then I told him of the fraud. He and my stepmother were much amused, and declared it would have been quite delightful if they had but known it was I; and said, except for the papers and money they could scarce

believe in the trick, I acted my part so well. I told them there was very little originality in it as far as I was concerned. Mary Robins had said nearly the whole of it to me.

“I so often afterwards heard of this scene that I could not forget it.”

“How much I should like to know what her dress was,” said Mrs. Askham.

“Perhaps it was the dress she adopted to play her part of ‘Mother Pendle,’” said Mr. Dale.

“Very likely. But we shall find it all out by degrees.”

CHAPTER II.

ANN'S WALK ON THE SANDS, AND WHAT
SHE FOUND THERE.

“MY dear grandfather died after a short illness. We left the sorrowful house after the funeral. Both my uncles came down as soon as they heard of his dangerous state, and my Uncle Henry left immediately after the funeral.

“MY Uncle George, now Lord Becklea, shut up the house for a couple of months, and I never entered its doors, or even the gates, again. When he came to reside there he brought his learned and scientific friends, who were constantly coming and going, but no other person except my father was admitted. I believe the only time he went beyond the gates was to attend my father's funeral. He was buried at Eddishowe.

“MY Uncle Henry lived almost entirely abroad;

and when my uncle Lord Becklea died, the funeral had to be delayed a fortnight for my Uncle Henry, the heir, to be present. He left Becklea as soon as he could, giving strict orders that the garden and house should be kept up as usual, that he might find it ready for him whenever he chose to come to it. But he never came again. He died abroad, and was not even buried in the family vault. His creditors seized upon, sold, scattered, and destroyed the estate, the house, and all its contents.

“After my grandfather’s death I went with my father and stepmother to the seaside. My father did not stay long, and I afterwards went with my stepmother to visit some of her relations. When she returned to Eddishowe I went back to the seaside on a visit.

“One day, when I was wandering along the seashore, I saw something which looked like a large bundle lying on the sands. I went up, and saw it was a man, who seemed hurt or stunned. He groaned ; but I could not see his face. I ran to some sailors, who were launching a boat at a little distance, and begged them go to his assist-

ance ; they went, and I followed. They said his face was cut and bleeding, and he seemed to have no power. I told them to carry him to the chemist's, where some cordial might be got for him. The chemist looked at him, and said a surgeon must be fetched. The surgeon said it was a bad case ; for besides the wounds on the scalp and face, there was unconsciousness and utter prostration.

“They searched his pockets to discover who he was ; but no letter or written paper of any sort was to be found ; his handkerchief even had no mark on it. So, as I had found him, I thought I was in duty bound to take some care of him, and I desired he might be taken to the inn and properly attended to, and that, if necessary, I would defray all expenses.

“He remained there three days before he was able to give any account of himself. He then told his name and residence ; but was totally unable to say how he came to be so injured. He continued ill some time. It was evident that he was a needy man, and I insisted upon keeping my word, and defraying all the expenses

of his stay at the inn, as well as the doctor's charges.

“On his recovery his gratitude knew no bounds. He appeared to me to be a poetical and sentimental, a gentle and amiable man; somewhat younger than myself; fair and delicate-looking, and I *then* thought good-looking. I saw him frequently. He called me his good Samaritan, his preserver; said he owed his life to me. He was so dejected, so melancholy; and said the few minutes he spent with me were the light and sunshine of his lonely life, and a great deal more to the same effect.

“How can I repeat all the—‘trash, nonsense,’ I was going to say—that he poured into my ears. I was myself very unhappy, having been told the sad end of all my hidden hopes by Lady Coryton. Odious woman! My hatred is for her who told me, not for him who had forsaken me, never cared for me, most probably! My heart was sore stricken; had received an unhealing wound. A vacuum was left, and this poor sentimental creature crept in to fill it. I tried to reject him, but to no purpose. I was over-

reached by pity, and I found myself inextricably bound to him, John Lystone !

“ This I write after many years’ delay to fill a gap in my history. Oh that I had never had to write it !

“ I returned home, and kept my secret till he urged me to declare my engagement—on his knees, in his imploring way—when I met him at our trysting-place ; for, for some reason he would not admit, he would not come to my father’s house, he said, till I had settled the question with him. (I always thought this strange, but considered it might be from his humility !) So at last I told my stepmother.”

The Colonel groaned. “ So this is the history of her most solemn step in life ! ” he said. “ But still she does not say who had forsaken her. It was some malice of Lady Coryton’s, I am convinced.”

“ Dear Ivor, it pains you to hear this,” said Mrs. Askham.

“ Yes, Lousia, it is painful, I own. Still I want to hear her story.”

CHAPTER III.

AN ELOPEMENT.

“It was agreed with my stepmother that she should tell my father of my engagement to John Lystone. She had with the utmost affection urged me to break off the match, saying it was not yet too late. But I answered that I had plighted my faith to him, and marry him I felt I must. Besides, I loved him dearly. I much dreaded my father’s anger, for I had often heard him speak in the strongest terms against the Lystone family.

“At last the time came. I was sitting alone in the morning room, when I heard his footstep. My heart beat strongly. He entered ; his face wore an expression of anger not often seen there. My usual spirit—rebellious, I suppose I should call it—rose up ; all fear left me, and I was calm and possessed. I rose as he entered ; he shut the door and stood before me.

“ ‘ Ann,’ he said, ‘ what is this I hear concerning you ? I am told you have consented to wed a man who will be a disgrace to yourself and to us. I need not ask you if this is true, for it comes from one who knows not falsehood. ’

“ ‘ Sir, it is quite true that I am engaged to be married ; but that, I hope, will not disgrace you,’ I answered, in a determined manner.

“ ‘ And is it thus that you set yourself against your father ? ’

“ ‘ Father, I am of age, and long past.’

“ ‘ Of age, truly ; but in the discretion which is supposed to accompany it you are utterly deficient. And I do not consider that the mere fact of your being over twenty-one years of age can cancel your duty to me, or be the excuse for your making an unworthy marriage. Has it ever occurred to you what will be the effects to yourself of this ill-assorted marriage ? You, who have been brought up in and belong to an old and honourable family ; you, who have been born in the midst of luxury and high-breeding, and know not what vulgarity and low-breeding is ; you who have had ample means at your disposal

all your life, and do not know what meanness, poverty, and want mean ; you, who can have no conception of the sorrows and struggles belonging thereto ? ’

“ ‘ Oh, father ! I have seen poverty and do not dread it,’ I broke in, impatiently.

“ ‘ Seen poverty ? Where ? In a poor cottage perhaps ; but that is not the poverty *you* might have to endure. Remember, these poor people are born to that poverty ; they know nothing else ; they would be as utterly at a loss and out of place with riches as you would feel constrained and miserable without them. This, however, may perhaps never be your case. You have a little fortune of your own, and it is to be hoped the man of your choice has a profession, or the means of earning sufficient to keep you in the comfort you ought to have, if not in luxury. Can you tell me anything of his means or his prospects ? ’

“ ‘ No, father ; I never inquired.’

“ ‘ What was there that prepossessed you in his favour ? It could not be his good looks or his fine manners, which often affect the minds of

young women ; for I am told he is totally wanting in both. What was it then ?’

“ ‘ I do not know ; except it were pity, for he looked unhappy.’

“ ‘ Pity !’ cried my father, scornfully. ‘ Unhappy ! Well, Ann, I never could have given you credit for sentimentality.’

“ ‘ He spoke to me in a way no one else ever did, and I love him dearly ; so dearly that I cannot live without him.’

“ ‘ Ann, this dream of love will soon vanish, I do assure you. An ill-assorted marriage can never be anything but sorrow, distrust, a rankling of the heart that never diminishes, is ever increasing. Your sensitiveness to low-breeding is born and has been nurtured in you. Believe me, however tender and fine his speeches and manner may be to you now, at the first obstacle, the first reverse, all the vulgarity of *his* nature will show itself ; even the few delicate habits of life he may commence his married life with will soon wear off. The coarseness of his nature cannot but assert itself ; the mask cannot be worn for ever.’

“ ‘ Oh, father, you are too harsh to him. He is not indeed the low fellow you make him.’

“ ‘ My child, I know him better than you do, for I know his parentage. I do not know him personally, and I never will, whether he be your husband (which God forbid) or not. He never shall enter my door. Even if he had never presumed to pay his addresses to you, I should have objected to admit him, or any of his family, within my house ; but now that he has had the impertinence, the presumption, the—the—I cannot find a word to express my indignation at his conduct—to propose for your hand, he shall never with my leave set his foot on my ground ; nor will I consent to your marriage.’ He paused for a minute or two, then continued, ‘ Choose between me and him. One or the other you must give up. Think what your associates will be with him for your lord and master.’

“ ‘ My lord and master, sir ? ’ I cried, with surprise and dismay. ‘ That he can never be. He will be my dear and loving husband.’

“ ‘ Trash, Ann : YOUR LORD AND MASTER, I

say again ; and he will assert it at the fitting moment, or if too weak to do so, some of his own people will do so in his stead, if it be only to taunt and annoy you. Remember, when a woman marries she does it “for better for worse ;” and without wishing to be a bad prophet for my child’s future, I cannot but know that, except under the most extraordinarily favourable circumstances, when a woman marries below her station she is visited by all the odium, the jealousy, and ill-will that her husband’s family can put upon her.’

“ ‘ Oh, father, how harsh and unkind you are ! Why should all these miseries come upon me ? ’ ”

“ ‘ Through your own act. I speak from the experience of what I have seen and known. You act from your inexperience and your headstrong nature. The latter, however, may perhaps, in the career you have chosen, stand you in good need in some trying scenes. I can see nought for you but misery in this match, and I heartily wish you would be guided by me and your mother, and give it up ; it is not yet too late.’ ”

“ ‘ I cannot give it up. I have given my

word, and how can I break it? I love him so dearly.'

" 'False semblance of love ! Love in its purity cannot exist between two such opposite natures. Believe me, Ann, when the delusion of the moment is over, loathing will be a more appropriate word for your feelings towards him and his people.'

" 'Father, spare me,' I cried.

" 'Spare you, my child ! Willingly and wishfully would I do so ; and it is in order to effect this that I set before you the present and future of this dream of yours in the strongest colours that truth will permit. Did I ever deceive you? Again I tell you to elect between me and your own relations, and him and his low people. They will be unalterably *yours* when you are married ; and the few relatives remaining on your mother's side will surely not associate with him and them—no one could expect that they would ; my few relations you *know* will not. Thus you will be alone in the world to bear your lot the best way you can. Even if your mother's family notice *you* only, it will bring a division in

your own fireside, and make misery and strife where peace might otherwise have been possible.’

“ ‘They will not care to see me, I know, father.’

“ ‘Perhaps not, after the exceedingly rude and unbecoming manner in which you treated your cousin when he proposed to you ; but still they may forgive and forget. That was an alliance which would have pleased everybody, and you would yourself have been happy and in your proper sphere.’

“ At this I began to cry ; for it brought back to my mind that I acted thus to keep faithful to my first love, not knowing that I was deserted, forgotten, by him, as Lady Coryton had told me.

“ My father drew me towards him and kissed my forehead. After a few minutes of silence, he said—

“ ‘Think over what I have said to you, Ann, and finally let me have the gratification of hearing from your own lips that you, my child, are not going to sacrifice both yourself and us to your folly.’

“ ‘ I cannot do so, _father,’ I sobbed ; and he left the room.

“ ‘ The whole misery of my life may, I feel, be dated from this day. Up to the time of this interview with my father I had never seen the position into which I was being drawn. I had considered myself the free agent I felt myself to be ; I never contemplated being under the control (‘ lord and master ’ grated on my memory) of any one. I wept bitterly. After some time I went in search of my stepmother, whom I found in her room.

“ ‘ Mother, dear mother, why did you not come to me ? ’ I cried, kneeling down beside her chair.

“ ‘ My love, I considered it best you should be alone with your father.’

“ ‘ Then she spoke on the same subject, her judgment being the same as my father’s, and her sorrow great when I stated the impossibility of my giving up my engagement.

“ ‘ Things went on miserably for some weeks. No one was unkind to me ; all went on as usual ; but *the subject not to be mentioned* created a coldness and restraint that was almost unbearable.

“I had not seen John Lystone for some time. His letters and mine were sent and came through a trusty carrier from the next village.

“The night arrived when I was to elope, and John Lystone made his signal at the appointed time. How I trembled when I heard it ; but I threw open my window. A ladder was placed by him, and he stood at the foot to steady it. I threw down a small but heavy packet, which I heard fall and break a plant below. ‘How careless you are,’ he said, in a low tone. I hesitated. His manner alarmed me. I, however, came down a few rungs of the ladder.

“‘Make haste,’ he said ; ‘how slow you are. Don’t you know our time is precious?’

“I did not like his ordering me thus, and it was not his usual voice. I hesitated again, and was on the point of running up again into my room, and shutting the window ; but an impatient ‘tut tut’ from him recalled me to him, and I went down. He received me in his arms. In a minute he had seized the ladder and put it down on the grass. I picked up my packet, and we were soon walking along the fields lithely and

merrily in the moonlight. A post carriage was waiting for us, and we drove off to York, where we had breakfast, and then went to St. Theophilus' church, where we were married.

"I left a letter to my father on my dressing-table; and I hoped in vain for an answer and an invitation to return to him. But I had forgotten that I had not told him where to find me. My time passed happily enough for some weeks. John was kind and considerate; there was nothing to mar my content but this craving for a letter from 'home,' as I still called it.

" 'It's your home no longer,' said John; 'you'll have to consider my house your home in future, so you'd better leave off fretting.'

"I looked up astonished.

" 'Why you must have known this before we were married, old lady,' he said, as he saw my look of astonishment.

" 'Old lady?' I said.

" 'Ay, my love. Old lady, or young lady, or "my lady," if you like, but my wife for all that,' he said, in a taunting voice.

"My father's words, 'your lord and master,'

came into my mind. I was daunted, silent ; I knew not what to do or say. John and I evidently did not understand each other yet. I suppose he thought he had gone too far ; for he came up to me, and kneeling on one knee, put his arm round my waist as I sat, and said in the imploring voice I had so often been moved by—

“ ‘ Forgive me, Ann ; I did not mean offence.’ ”

“ At last, after many letters from me to both my father and my stepmother, I received a letter from her, saying she was deputed by my father to say I might go ALONE to Eddishowe, and that I might stay two nights ; and that if I went by the mail coach to the village, the carriage should be sent to meet me. John was offended at my joy to go ‘ home,’ as I could not help calling it.

“ ‘ Remember, I shall come and fetch you,’ he said.

“ ‘ Oh, John, pray do not ; I beseech you to let me pay this visit absolutely alone.’ And so at last it was settled.

“ When I arrived, my father stood at the hall door to receive me, with the most stern and sad face. He held out his hand, drew me to him,

and kissed me on the forehead, but said not a word. My stepmother came running out and took me in her arms. We wept together.

“I did not see my father again till dinner-time; in fact I seldom saw him but at meals. He spoke very little, and I never saw a smile on his face the whole time I was there. My stepmother told me he was nearly heart-broken at my conduct. The shock was so great when he found I had run away, he was like one stunned; and afterwards he was in a towering rage, threatening all sorts of things against John Lystone.

“But I was ‘OF AGE!’

“What miseries cannot these five letters cover! what imprudences! They seal our fate—often our misery.

“I left. My father did not take leave of me. John was angry to see me return in tears, and without any protestations of love in answer to his. He declared I should not go away again; it destroyed my peace of mind. He expected to see me joyful at my return ‘home,’ as he called it—a miserable lodging! I was cross, and

declared it was not my home, and it should not be, that it was not a fit place for me to be in.

“‘Ho, ho, my lady!’ he said. ‘This is where I live, and you must put up with it.’

“We had not been married six months, and it had come to this! ‘Your lord and master’ came into my mind.

“Storms and sunshine succeeded each other in our domestic life. John was out at his business all day; he was clerk in some office. My days were solitary; we lived in a back street, which was narrow and dismal. I did not dare go to the Minster, for fear of meeting my old friends. How could I tell them where I lived!

“I often heard from my stepmother, and after some time I got an invitation to go and stay with them a few days; my father was not well, and she wished me to come. It was nearly two years since I had been ‘home,’ as I still called it. John was angry, asking, What did I want to go there for? Was I not happy enough with him?

“At last I went. My father received me more kindly than before, and my stepmother was

always good and affectionate. There did not seem to be much the matter with my father. He rode out every day as usual ; but he was reduced to a shadow of his former self.

“ I should like to have gone over to Becklea, but my uncle would not let any one within his gates except my father and the scientific men he invited to see him. My Uncle Henry was specially excluded ; and as to me ! since my marriage I seemed to be absolutely forgotten ! However, I saw Mr. and Mrs. Dale, and Charlotte, a merry handsome girl, though too florid to be a beauty. I was so glad to see them again, but it was not the same as formerly.

“ Is it always so when people are married ? or was mine a peculiar case ? For myself—as John was not with me—I did not feel the least altered ; still it was not the same ; we were not on the same footing. I stayed long at Eddishowe ; for after some days my father grew much weaker, and he could not bear me out of his sight. He frankly forgave me my misdeeds, and prayed fervently for my health and prosperity. Having done this, as though his last

act and wish was accomplished, he fell into a drowsy state, seldom speaking, and remained so for some days ; and he died quietly one morning whilst I and my stepmother were sitting by him. He had taken our hands in his a few minutes before he breathed his last, and kept them there.

“ Who can tell our grief !

“ I remained for some time after the funeral to help my stepmother pack up. The Living, being in the Becklea gift, was immediately given to a relation of one of my uncle’s scientific friends, whom none of us knew. My uncle defrayed all expenses that might fall upon us. This was the only generosity he showed us ; for he said it took all he could spare to keep my Uncle Henry, or pay his debts.

“ When I returned to my miserable abode in the back street, John was pleased to see me. This time I had come back with an addition to my small fortune, which greatly pleased him. He said it was something uncommon in his family to have anything to inherit ! Affairs went more smoothly for some time.

“ One day, when I was sitting alone, the door

opened, and a man, I cannot call him a gentleman, came in ; he made a stiff sort of bow with his hat in his hand, and said—

“ ‘ Your servant, ma’am. Mrs. John Lystone, I presume.’ ”

“ ‘ Yes, sir,’ I said, in a distant manner. ‘ My husband is out ; pray what do you want ? ’ ”

“ ‘ Want, Mistress Ann ! Why you, to be sure. Don’t ye know who I am ? ’ ”

“ ‘ No, sir,’ I said, scornfully.

“ ‘ Why I’m Tom Lystone, at your service ; John’s brother. Don’t ye see the likeness betwixt us ? ’ ”

“ ‘ No, sir,’ said I.

“ ‘ Well, I don’t think you will ; I’m not such a sawny as he is. You’ll find me much the better fellow of the two.’ ”

“ ‘ Indeed, sir, I shall not,’ I said, getting much annoyed.

“ ‘ Ay, but you will,’ he replied.

“ And I interrupted him, desiring him to leave the room and the house ; and if he wanted to speak to his brother, to wait till he came home.

“‘Not so fast, ma’am,’ said he; ‘I’m not going to be turned out of my brother’s house.’

“‘Sir, it is my house also, and I desire you will not intrude upon me.’

“I thought he was tipsy, but afterwards found this was his usual style. He left the room with a low bow and a loud laugh, saying, ‘At your service, ma’am.’

“I was quite agitated, saying to myself, ‘If these are the rough people I am to have about me, what shall I do?’ I remembered my father’s words and shuddered.

“When John came home he told me he had met his brother. ‘He’s a queer fellow,’ he said, ‘and I told him not to come and annoy you.’ He did not at that time tell me the unpleasant scene there had been when they met.”

“I get quite in a fever, mamma,” said Lucy, at this point of the narrative. “Poor woman! How dreadful to have such a scene with one’s father! Oh, papa, I could not do so.”

“It is to be hoped not, my dear; but her father spoke very sensibly.”

“She still does not say who had forsaken her,” said the Colonel.

“I recognize Lady Coryton in her mischief-making,” remarked Mr. Llewellyn.

CHAPTER IV.

ANN MARRIED.

“THINGS went on from bad to worse. We were in debt; we had always been in debt. My small fortune, which in my former life had been so ample that I never could spend it all, when I came to keep house and servants was the poorest pittance. Besides, I had expected to live in the style to which I had been accustomed, notwithstanding it was in a dismal back street.

“My husband lost his appointment. Here was more trouble; what could we do? How could we live with less money and increasing debts? He told me he must sink some of my money to pay our debts.

“‘It’s all your fault,’ he would scream at me, in a passionate manner. ‘You can’t forget you

are no longer "the Lady Ann," with your grandfather's money to throw away as you like. You've no thought for me. You are not the least use to me with your fid-fad nonsense. See what a bill I have got to-day for "chairs." Why can't you walk like other people? If it's dirty, tuck up your coats and trudge like other women.'

" 'Trudge ! ' "

" ' Yes, trudge, Mrs. John Lystone. ' "

" ' Your vulgarity, John, is only surpassed by your brother Tom's. Is this the way you speak to me ? I am ashamed of you. ' "

" Poor weak John was soon cowed. He came as usual with his imploring face to ask my pardon. And I, too, am weak on some points ; I cannot withstand that look of utter dejection, sorrow, misery of mind which he assumes. No ; I could forgive him anything when he had that expression in his face, and that humble posture, with one knee on the ground, and his hands raised to catch my hand or my garment. I have sometimes believed that he was an exceedingly good actor and observer ; so that, having

once found out his power in that position, he assumed it whenever he wanted to gain his point.

“How can I tell half the sorrows and cares I had, not only at this time, but ever since the first year of my marriage? How often my father’s words came into my mind, ‘this dream of love.’ Dream it was; for there was no reality. And the form that had engrossed my mind in my girlish days was there still, and showed itself in such bright contrast to my ‘companion for life,’ as John called himself, that it made me feel I almost hated him and all his family and friends.

“Ah, Mr. Llewellyn! I cannot say you were false to me, for it is more than probable you never cared for me; yet you made an undying impression on my mind. But for that, how different might have been my fate! Can I ever forget the torture it was to me when Lady Coryton told me of the cold and heartless manner he had asked after me on his visits to her? his only remark being that I danced well! ‘Men are deceivers ever’ is an old and true adage; yet

why should I condemn him for faults natural to his sex?

“Lady Coryton said ‘he probably gave his heart for the moment to every girl he met, in every place his wandering soldier life took him.’ Can this be true of him? My grandmother, who knew what was right, had spoken in his favour, and her judgment was unfailing. Her words had ever clung to my memory, and his image has never faded from it. Sad has been my fate, to be so cruelly deceived. Yet how can I say that? It has been my own susceptibility and folly perhaps. What right had I to presume that I was aught but a passing shadow to him? I should rather, perhaps, be surprised that he had ever remembered to ask after me, leading as he did a roving life with the army, in the wars and out of them. How could his memory be charged with the partner of a dance.

“I try to reason with myself on this constant theme, this painful subject, as it has become since that day Lady Coryton revealed to me what she considered the *truth*, and which I in my unreasonableness cannot realize. It is true

he never by word or deed gave me any indication that I was more to him than any ordinary acquaintance ; but my heart is, and has ever been, wholly his, irrevocably his. I kept it for him. I would listen to no one so long as I could have a hope that——

“ But why should I continue this subject ? Lady Coryton’s speeches broke my heart ; I could care for no one after that. I was utterly miserable ; my spirit was gone with my lost love, and I had nothing to replace it till I met the (as I then thought) tender, meek John Lystone, suffering in body and in mind ; in body for want of care (I thought), in mind from some hidden cause too great for him to combat against *alone* ! How mistaken have I been. I have found a weak, pusillanimous creature, devoid of gentlemanly feeling, his strong point being *cunning*.

“ Poor John ! the pity I feel for him is the only hold he has had upon me, I do believe, for it can hardly be love ; not the love, the undying love, I had, I *have*, for my first, my only love.

“ My father’s words—my father’s words !

“Long they lay in abeyance; time had not yet come to verify them. But now, and long ago, they come forth again, and are ever being recalled by events. After he had had that sad interview with me, I sat down and wrote his words down, hoping that I might disprove his assertions; but I have lived to see them fulfilled to the letter. Folly, madness it was in me to disregard his counsel. Perhaps it is in punishment for my disobedience that all my children are taken from me. My little Edgar alone remains; and shall I succeed in rearing him? God only knows what he has in store for me and mine, but I dread the future for him. I cannot alienate him from his father’s relations, whose name he bears; yet I could not endure *my* son to be associated with such ruffians.

“I got the sad news of my Uncle Edgar’s death. John was away from home fortunately—oh, so fortunately; so that, as my uncle’s legacies were left in trust for my sole use, our family lawyer in York, good, kind Mr. Trueman, and my uncle’s banker in London, arranged all matters, and the beautiful plate my uncle left me was never seen by John, or it would probably through him be

got rid of by that odious and dishonest fellow Tom, his brother.

“It was some years before I saw it myself, for I was always afraid of having it taken from me. Poor John could not have resisted talking about ‘*his* riches,’ as he called everything I possessed; and he was always casting in my teeth our elopement, and its fortunate results to himself.

“‘Everything you have belongs to me, except your wedding-ring,’ he would say. ‘You couldn’t have marriage settlements to lock your money up from me. Not even wedding garments nor wedding presents could you have. Ha, ha, ha,’ he laughed, insultingly. ‘Yours was a fine wedding, wasn’t it, my pretty?’

“I turned from him indignantly and left the room.”

The Colonel got up from his chair when his name was pronounced, and stood frowning as though in despair, with his doubled hand pressed against his mouth. When Mr. Dale closed the paper, the Colonel went to his brother

and said, "That wicked woman! you knew her, Owaine. Is she still alive?"

"No, she died some years ago."

"May my malediction cleave to her!" cried the Colonel, in an angry tone.

"Oh, Ivor. How dreadful!" exclaimed Mrs. Askham.

"Think what she did, Louisa! She broke two hearts, and lost two lives; utterly lost have been both our lives through her evil tongue. Can any punishment be too great for her, here or hereafter? With such sins on her conscience, can she have died peaceably in her bed?" he added, addressing his brother.

"I do not know. But I was told she had alienated her family from her by her mischief-making habits, and she had no child with her to close her eyes in death!"

"She richly deserved to be so neglected." Then turning to Mrs. Askham, the Colonel said, "You will excuse me, my dear Louisa; I cannot listen to more to-night." With these words he left the room.

The papers were put aside, and it was several days before the reading was resumed.

CHAPTER V.

IN LONDON.

“IT is long since I wrote my journal. I have had no time, and no heart to write, yet I longed to do so, for it is a relief to make even pen and paper my confidants, having no living creature to whom I can open my heart.

“We have been wanderers. We left York and came to London, I riding pillion behind John, and my Edgar on my knee. The horses we found at every stage. We were a light weight, the three not weighing so much as an ordinary couple. We were a thin and miserable-looking trio ; Edgar so listless that he lay on my arm asleep the best part of the day. Notwithstanding the fatigue experienced in this mode of travelling, we were all three much the better for it ; the fresh air, the exercise, the fine warm weather, refreshed us, and Edgar could sit up

the last two days of our journey, and we were all sorry to get to the end of it. Twenty miles each day was the extent of our progress; some days we did not go so far, but we arrived before our luggage, which had been sent by the waggon, leaving York the same day we did.

“My husband’s writing was like copper-plate. He was famed for its excellence, and had been employed in engrossing deeds, public documents, and testimonials; so, when he lost his employment, he went as writing-master in York, and set up a small shop as a stationer, chiefly for sale to his pupils. This did not succeed; we sold off all we could to pay our debts, and got rid of more of my money; for having no settlements, nor any sort of marriage deeds, John could take from me all he chose. By this means we had a little ready money for our journey to London and present wants.

“We went by a different road from that I had travelled in my grandfather’s coach, so that I looked in vain for the houses we had visited by the way.

“We stopped short of London, as we did not

know where we should have to reside. John wanted to go to Stepney, where his family mostly were settled; but I strongly objected to that, not caring to see more of them than I could possibly help. He was sulky; but I was firm, and told him he might go if he chose, but I should not. So, to settle the matter, we went to the Angel Inn at Islington, where our horse was to be left, and stayed there some time.

“This was certainly as comfortable and happy a portion of my married life as any I had experienced. The genuine kindness of the landlord and landlady to me was most marked; they even anticipated my wishes. But John complained of their want of respect to him, and was for leaving as soon as possible. I contrived, however, to remain till he had found permanent employment. Then recommenced my household troubles. Once more in a dismal street, I felt the want of the pure open air of Islington. Edgar, too, grew pale; he missed our walks by the side of the New River; and as to my husband, though he was born in London, he disliked returning to the dull streets, for we could

not afford to live far from his employment in the City. Here too I was again persecuted by his brother Tom. The scenes that took place were most painful and annoying.

“Ah, my father’s words! How true they were.

“We tried to keep out of debt. John earned but little, and my money was much reduced. We could not afford to keep a servant. To whom could I apply in case of extreme want? was a question always in my mind. I found that Tom was in the habit of ‘borrowing,’ as he called it, money of my husband, whose character was too weak to stand against Tom’s persistency. He ‘borrowed’ to any amount; but its repayment never crossed his mind. I could not think for a long time how it came about that my money was always gone; and yet John, who was of parsimonious habits, never had a penny. He got sulky and rude in his answers when I inquired about it.

“‘What does it signify to you?’ he would say to me.

“‘It signifies a great deal, for it is my money, and it is being thrown away,’ I answered.

“ ‘You’re a pretty one,’ he retorted, with a contemptuous sneer, ‘to talk of its being thrown away. Remember your own extravagancies and whims.’

“ ‘John!’ I said, in an angry tone, and I looked at him over my shoulder.

“ ‘Come, come, none of your fine-lady airs, madam; you must submit to me as your husband.’

“ ‘Submit to you, sir! poor, weak, vacillating creature! These bad manners you have learned from your brother Tom, who rules you with a rod of iron, and you dare not resist him. I am quite certain that he takes your money from you. Say is it not so, John?’

“ ‘True, Ann, he has borrowed a little.’

“ ‘But does he intend to repay it, think you? No. Never. Believe me, John, not one penny will he ever return to you. It cannot go on so. The little I have remaining must be kept for ourselves. I cannot allow it to be given elsewhere. If you do not get back, or try to do so, from him what he has had, I must demand it from him myself.’

“ ‘Oh, Ann, dearest Ann, pray do not. I

could not answer for the consequences.' And he threw himself down on one knee, as usual when frightened, poor fellow! I could not withstand that look of despair. It is my very weak point I know, but I shall never conquer it.

"And so our differences always ended.

"That he was forced to confess to Tom that he had told me, or that I had found out, or guessed, that Tom borrowed money of him, I was led to surmise from his nervous and irritable manner with me. The weight of the secret bowed him down; he could neither eat nor sleep; he wandered about restlessly; our child's innocent play and remarks seemed agony to him.

"I begged him if he had any misery at heart to confide it to me. This only brought a shower of tears, groans, and sobs. If I had not pitied him, I must have treated him with utter contempt. He told me, at last, what had happened; but not half the story, as I afterwards found out—and so the matter ended.

"I am full of uneasiness, too, about my Edgar; he seems wasting away. A week ago I had to carry him about; he is no weight, however.

The doctor is kind and good, but nothing that he sends makes any difference; the hectic flush on the cheek and the fever continue. He recommended me to go back to Islington, and keep the child on new milk, which is to be had there fresh from the cows; but I was obliged to tell him our means would not admit of residence at a distance from John's work."

"So here we have had an explanation of the account-books we found. John kept a small stationer's shop," said Mr. Dale.

CHAPTER VI.

SORROWS.

“JOHN answered an advertisement in the newspaper for an engrosser, and was accepted. Certainly a more beautiful specimen of that style of writing could scarcely be found than the one he sent up for approbation.

“We left London for Bristol, where he was to be employed. We travelled pillion, as before, and enjoyed the journey. But again the situation of our dwelling did not agree with us. John got ague to a frightful degree. His employers had connections at Haverfordwest, and with their recommendation we removed there; this time in the packet. The sea agreed with him and Edgar, but I was very ill, and rejoiced to find myself on land again. The voyage was long and rough, and the accommodation bad and dirty.

“It soon became evident that Haverfordwest was not suited to us. John’s health was so bad, his breath so short he could scarcely get up and down the streets, steep almost as a W, and his pay so small that we could not subsist. Edgar, however, rallied; the keen air which came across from the sea invigorated him.

“We left again by the packet, this time to go to Whitehaven. The vessel was even worse found than the former one, and we had some very unpleasant people on board. They called Edgar and me ‘grandeess,’ because we would not associate with them. But they took kindly to poor John; and it was on board this packet, after a long afternoon with these vagrants (for I am certain they were no better), that I, for the first time, saw John the worse for drink. They said a little spirit would do his asthma good.

“Oh, how I loathed the poor drivelling wretch when he came staggering into the cabin! He looked utterly debased, and his talk was most insolent and low; he swore at me and at everything. I had never heard him swear before. Edgar crept close to me, and would not go near

him. He was not himself again for a couple of days.

“I strictly forbade John to go with those people again. They called him a poor hen-pecked honey, and one gave him a slight kick as he passed. I appealed to the captain to keep order. He was a coarse sailor, but had the good sense to follow up my suggestion and confine the vagrants to their proper place, before the mast.

“This seemed to me a never-ending voyage, constant tacking about to catch the wind. ‘About she comes’ was for ever heard some days ; next, close reefed for a storm. We did not appear to advance a mile ; provisions, too, we were told, were getting short ; and we had but half-a-pint of water a day, each of us. Our clothes too were all dirty ; and when we arrived at Whitehaven I felt quite ashamed of our condition.

“We had determined to return to York. But this was not to be. I thought I had already had my share of troubles, but greater ones awaited me. Edgar was too ill to ride, and too

big for me to carry on my knee, riding pillion, as he had done before ; so we hired a cart to take us as far as the next great town, then we got another to take us on, and so to the end of the journey.

“ Our way led us over Woodnaston Common, on a lovely summer afternoon. Oh, how beautiful was the view ! Edgar sat up quite revived, and exclaimed, ‘ Do let us stay here,’ and cried bitterly when we said we could not. We finally got to a little village beyond Wakefield, and were obliged to stop there on account of the severe illness of both John and Edgar.

“ John, poor fellow, became quite a different person. Whatever there was of gentle and good feeling in him came out ; indeed, I had not given him credit for so much amiability.

“ He thanked me over and over again for all my kindness and consideration for him. He begged my pardon a thousand times for all his own shortcomings, and the great trials I had had, not only from himself, but also from his brother Tom’s ill conduct. He entreated of me, warned me, never to have anything to do with

him ; revealed to me how systematically he had robbed himself and me, gave me a paper he called his will, and after a long and fatiguing evening, clouded with tears from both of us, he sank back exhausted, and never awoke again.

“I sat by watching him, thinking over my whole life, and especially my life with him, with great remorse. Poor fellow, there he lay a perfect shadow, breathing hard and unconscious, if not asleep. At dawn of day his life was gone.

“I remained at the village a week ; then Edgar and I set off again, but not to go far, for he was so weak he could not travel along the rough roads in the primitive cart I had hired. All that he wished was to go back to the pretty Common where he could play about in the sunshine all the day, and see the pretty view ; he teased me and teased me to go back. I saw he was wasting away daily, and at the end of a few months he was taken from me.

“Shall I ever forget that misery ? His father’s death I could look back to with resignation, but this child’s seemed too great a bereavement for

me to bear. What should I do, alone in the world? whither should I fly? I remained some weeks in the village, and daily visited my darling's resting-place; but that Common which he had taken so great a fancy for had fixed itself in my mind also. Could his spirit have gone to linger there? It was the only place he had begged with tears to return to. Yes, I would go there, and try to find a residence.

“We had remarked the little hut, as we called it, that stood on the rise. I will go and see if it is to be had. I can live there alone, with the recollection of him. But how conceal myself from Tom Lystone, who will try all means to find us, for he cannot know that poor John is dead. I must look into my affairs, and consult with Mr. Trueman, who has been my friend for so many years.

“Crowds of ideas, plans, and thoughts passed through my mind; I could not separate one from the others. My chief aim was to pass unknown, that I might never be traced by Tom Lystone. How was this to be effected? One so cunning as he, and so practised in low deceptions,

might be capable of any base design. The little money and few effects I had saved he might get possession of. Some one might inadvertently give him information which would lead to my discovery. All these and many more reflections pressed upon me. I was puzzled and scared ; I felt like some hunted animal, or slave, my enemy having laid traps for me.

“ At last, one night, as I lay awake, the recollection came to me of my dressing up at Becklea in the habiliments of the almshouse woman, and the success it was ; even my nearest relations did not recognize me. I had two suits, winter and summer, of the clothes quite new, which I had appropriated when some arrived at Becklea from York, where they were made ; and one suit I had often worn. These had remained packed up in York under kind Mr. Trueman’s care, who knew nothing of the contents of the box. I will adopt this dress for the rest of my life, which I hope will not be a long one.

“ I determined to go back to Ulsford, the town we had slept at nearest to Woodnaston Common ; there was no fear of my forgetting

these names, for my Edgar had them always on his lips.

“So far I settled my plans. But still how about my name, which would betray me under any disguise of dress. The idea of taking a name to which I had no lawful right was repugnant to me beyond measure; a name that appertained to another person; surely that might be punishable by law. I should betray myself completely if I resumed my maiden name.

“I thought Mr. Trueman might help me. Still if any one but myself knew of my incognito, how could the secret be kept? Tom is so sly he could worm a secret out of any one; and what would become of me if he knew where I am to be found? I considered, too, that I should make up my mind to this before I communicated with Mr. Trueman.

“After much reflection, it suddenly came into my mind that the name of my great-grandmother’s estate, Pendlebury, would not be amiss. Not the whole of it—Tom Lystone might remember that; but half of it, ‘Pendle;’

the name would suit as well for Cumberland, with its hills, as Cornwall.

“So I settled that point ; and in order to keep the name entirely to myself, I should call myself ‘Mistress Ann Pendle.’

“I therefore wrote to Mr. Trueman, begging him to send me certain boxes he had in his charge for me, to arrive at Ulsford on the day mentioned, to be addressed to ‘Mrs. Ann Pendle’ at Ulsford, where I should find them, but my name was not to appear. Letters in the same way were to be enclosed to her address. I never gave any address for myself ; but as I most often posted my letters at Ulsford, they had of course that stamp on them. Nevertheless, I took the precaution to have them posted at other places occasionally, although never at Woodnaston.

“Thus, even if my persecutor Tom Lystone should find his way to Ulsford or its neighbourhood, my name of Lystone would not be known ; nor should I be recognized in my disguise, even if he met me. I was the more secure in this, for my hair had grown almost

white in the last years, and since I had seen him.

“Having made these arrangements, I one day set out before daylight, walking towards Ulsford. I had sent off my boxes the day before, and made everything straight at my lodging. My boxes were to be left at the next town. I walked there, resting often on the road, and arriving at dusk. I found all my boxes arrived, and I hired a cart for the next day to take myself and them all the way to Ulsford.

“I set off, sitting on my boxes in the manner of poor travellers, and completely covered by my large cloak and hood. I did not feel very comfortable under the new name I had assumed ; but I could devise no other plan for safety. I felt frightened and nervous the first few times I was called by it, and I tried not to hesitate or look aside when I had to pronounce it, for I knew that would create suspicion. I succeeded so far that no one looked doubtingly at me ; but I felt so guilty of fraud, that if any one had touched me I should have shrieked or fallen.”

“So here we have the secret of her name and dress,” remarked Mr. Dale, “and of her choice of residence.”

“What a hard life for one of her birth,” added Mrs. Askham.

“Poor dear! poor dear!” said the Colonel, as he paced up and down the room.

CHAPTER VII.

ANN GOES TO WOODNASTON.

“My journey took some days to accomplish. I got cold and sick. I felt my loneliness very much ; it was a new life to me, having to act the poor traveller.

“I had not been able to afford a servant for a very long time ; but when I had John and Edgar to attend to I did not feel the want of one. The girls I had had during my married life had been more trouble and expense than use to me. They were of an inferior class, and required so much teaching and looking after that I was much happier and better served without them. Yet, when I was left quite alone, the trouble of attending to myself only grew irksome. I had no one to please or to think of.

“My Edgar would in his childish way try to help me, and amused me with his funny ways

and prattle. All was gone now ; dead silence took the place of the music of his voice. My life, my exertions, everything had been for him. This journal was begun for him ; the only inducement for continuing it is its solace in lonely hours. Yet who will read it, or care for it, except as curious records of a lost family ! It is no use——

“ Here my journal was interrupted ; for many months I had not heart to write.

“ I arrived at Ulsford far from well. I went to the least pretentious inn, as best suited to my assumed position ; but I always found, wherever I stopped, that I was not accounted by the innkeepers to be of the low class of travellers. A nice clean room was always selected for me, and I was without exception taken into the landlady’s own sitting-room for my meals. ‘ You would not care to go into the tap, ma’am, would you ? ’ being the first inquiry.

“ These people see so much of life that they are shrewd guessers of persons and position. I am grateful for these attentions, which are still continued to me by that class. I stayed at this little

Inn, 'The Traveller's Rest,' for some days. I had to nurse myself, the cold had taken so strong a hold of me. The landlady was very kind. She got me everything she could think of to do me good, or that I might like.

"I left myself to her care, for I feared to betray myself by asking for things not usually needed by persons of my supposed class. Also I feared by my conversation to betray myself; so I became silent and observant, trying to learn how to act in my new position; for I found, especially during my illness, that my wants and desires always reverted to my station in early life; the privations of later years were as if they had never been, having no power to interfere with my former habits.

"I was much amused at the landlady's many little artifices to discover who I really was; she seemed in doubt. My silence may have been one cause; for, listening to what others said who came to sit with her, I found they all had some history to tell, which she entered into heart and soul, as it were, for the moment, and sympathized with them to their great content.

But I had never communicated a single incident of my journey, or before it, or told where I came from, or whither I was going.

At last one day she said—

“ ‘Surely, ma’am, you’ve been accustomed to good houses?’ ”

“ ‘Yes, I have,’ I could with truth answer.

“ ‘Then, ma’am, you must find this but a poor place to put up at.’ ”

“ ‘It is very comfortable, and you are very good to me,’ I answered, hoping to have no more questions.

“ ‘Perhaps, ma’am, you’ve been a housekeeper, or a nurse, or perhaps a lady’s tirewoman?’ ”

“ ‘I have,’ I answered, fearing to be drawn into falsehoods.

“ ‘Ay, I thought so, and so did my man. You haven’t the ways of poor people.’ ”

“Fortunately a customer took her away, or I know not what I should have said. I considered it was time that I should set up my lonely home; therefore, as soon as I was well enough for the journey, I took advantage of a cart going to Woodnaston to return the same

day, to visit the 'hut' on the Common, and find out to whom it belonged.

"It was a lovely summer's day; much such another as that on which my Edgar set his heart on this particular spot. I walked up to the hut; it looked empty; the shutter was closed, the door locked. I went to the Inn to inquire about it, and heard it, as well as the whole village, belonged to Squire Askham at the Hall, and I had better inquire of him or his bailiff. It was not in my nature to apply to an underling, so I took my chance and walked to the Hall.

"The lodge-keeper said the Squire was at home she believed, and asked me my business. I answered it was with him alone, and she opened the gate for me. I went to the hall door and rang the bell, quite forgetting my disguise. A footman came, and told me I should go round to the back, for 'beggars' were not admitted at the front door. I said I was no beggar.

"'You've a petition then, I s'pose,' said he.

"'No,' I replied; 'but I desire to speak to

Mr. Askham, and I beg you will ask his permission.'

"Upon this the man went off, and left me standing at the open door. He came back after a few minutes, and begged me to walk in. He had recalled me to my assumed position, and in his absence I had stood thinking how I ought to behave in my interview with the Squire.

"The man showed me into the library, where stood a tall, fine-looking man of about fifty or more years of age. Very sad and grave he looked, but his voice was low and kindly when he asked me what I wanted. I told him. Then he asked me who I was. There came my difficulty. I had scarcely yet learned to frame my mouth to my new name; I always expected to stammer or say it in a suspicious manner. However, I suppose I did neither, for he repeated it, 'Mistress Ann Pendle.'

"In answer to his questions, I told him I had taken a fancy to the cottage on passing it some time back, and he seemed satisfied. He said it wanted cleaning, which he would have done for me, named the smallest modicum of rent, and

said the key should be left at the post-office for me on that day week.

“Mr. Askham told me that I might go over the cottage any day I liked, except that day, for his bailiff was absent. I thanked him and retired. I stood all the time at the door, as I had done when personating the old almshouse woman at Becklea in my young days, and made a curtsy both on entering and leaving the room. He looked at me observingly, and wished me good afternoon, at the same time ringing the bell. But I was pleased to find I had reached the hall door, and was walking away, before the footman came to let me out. How I dreaded encountering that liveried fellow !

“I returned to Ulsford after leaving my name at the post-office as the person to whom the key of the cottage was to be given.

“The next day I was busy buying some furniture for the cottage. I could see no place in Woodnaston like an upholsterer’s shop.

“I took another journey to Woodnaston to see the cottage. There were whitewashers and a

carpenter at work there. The latter said Mr. Askham had desired that any cupboards or shelves required should be put up, and I suggested a few alterations, which were made.

“On my return to Ulsford, the landlady of the little Inn said, that as I was getting furniture, she would like me to see an old-fashioned turn-up bedstead she had, and would be glad to sell. It answered my purpose in many ways, and I bought it. I have never regretted this purchase; it was exactly what I required for my future arrangements.

“The day named for my entry into the cottage, the cart was packed by early morn, and I set off in it, sitting on a box as before. The driver tried to enter into conversation with me; but I was sad, and in tears, and he could get but short answers.

“He specially remarked on the great weight of some of my packages, which I explained contained great old books and other things which I could not find it in my heart to part with. He sympathized with me, cheered me by telling me I should have a good landlord in Squire Askham;

advised me as to the purchase of fuel, which I had quite forgotten all about ; said I had better get some as we passed through the village. In fact he became quite a guardian and adviser to me, assisting most kindly to arrange my effects in the cottage, and it was late in the evening before he left me to my solitude, to return to Ulsford.

“The next morning I awoke to the full sense of my loneliness. I had never before been so completely alone ; not a soul to speak to ; no one of my own class ever to associate with more ! It is all my own doing ; I should not complain.

“The thought has often come across me—if I had but run up the ladder again, when I hesitated on that night of my flight from home, what a different lot mine might have been. Still, I had lost the one I loved, the one I had set my heart upon ; he had proved that I, alas, was nothing to him. No doubt I had been very, very foolish ever to have thought it probable he could care for me on so short an acquaintance—a couple of hours, perhaps ; yet

the impression he left on my mind is indelible even at this distance of time ; it is never absent for long together. But again I must repeat, of what use are regrets, though they will force themselves upon me !

“ It wanted three months of the usual half-yearly rent-day, on Mr. Askham’s estate, when I went to the cottage ; so when that day arrived I went up to the Hall, money in hand, to pay my first rent. Mr. Askham was sitting in the audit-room, with a large table covered with papers and books before him ; his bailiff sitting at a smaller table to one side.

“ He saw me enter ; there were many others, principally men, in the room ; but as soon as I entered he called me to the table. I made my obeisance, as in duty bound, when I had got half way up the long room ; my clogs made a clattering noise that annoyed me. I gave him my money ; he looked pleased, and spoke to me kindly, asking me if I was comfortable at the cottage, if there were anything I wished for to make me more so ; then invited me to the audit dinner, at which he himself presided. But this

I declined with grateful thanks, wondering if I had said what was proper for one of my semblance.

“He was sorry I would not come, as he liked to see all his tenants around him on that day, and made for me as my excuse the changeableness of the weather, which might affect me if I stayed out late. I again made my curtsy and retired; the men who were seated rising as I passed. I felt much distressed and perfectly ashamed all this time, and so nervous that I fancied something would trip me up and I should fall as I walked out. Fortunately there were no liveried servants waiting about.

“I got back to the cottage as best I could, sat down, and had a good cry. Mr. Askham’s kind manner was too much for me. It was a relief to think I should not have to go through this ordeal again for another six months.

“The church at Woodnaston is not far from my cottage. It is on my side of the village down the hill from the Common, and occupies a corner of the park. It is an ancient building, not so plain internally as the generality of

country churches. This may be partly attributed to the number of handsome monuments, principally to members of the Askham family, also to the Cavendish family, whose estate is a few miles off.

“The monument to Mr. Askham’s late wife is very fine ; an angel in white marble, the full size of a person, is especially beautiful ; the feathers on the wings seem as if they could be ruffled with a breath, and the expression of the face is calm and benevolent.

“The Rector, a very old man, got through his duty with difficulty, although Mr. Askham or the school-master read the lessons for him each Sunday. He could not be persuaded to have a Curate, who was to be paid by Mr. Askham. He was a widower without a family, and he lived the life of a recluse. He died quite lately, and is succeeded by a distant relative of Mr. Askham’s, called ‘a hunting Parson,’ of the name of Dale.

“Can I describe my astonishment, I may almost say my dismay, when I heard he was the Rev. Alan Dale, from Eddishowe !

“ ‘Surely I may be discovered now,’ I said to myself. What shall I do? whither shall I fly? My old despair! It would go hard with me to leave this cottage, round which my child’s spirit seems to hover. He is ever present with me in imagination; the loneliness is gone when I think of him. No, I cannot leave. I must stay here at any cost to myself. I must be more secretive, if necessary; associate with no one; take heed of no one.

“I was curious to see Alan Dale again, with whose family we had been so intimate in former days. But it was so many years since we had met, and so seldom, on account of his long absences, that I scarcely thought I should recognize him; but I am, I know, such a thorough Thurstane, that I much fear he may remember in me the family features, and perhaps the voice. That he may not, I sincerely hope.”

“How interesting this journal is, particularly the latter parts, where her life here is included. I can easily imagine her dread of being recognized by you, Mr. Dale,” said Mrs. Askham.

“I never in the least recognized her; I had quite forgotten all about the Thurlestanes. I do not think that my sister Charlotte, even, would have traced any resemblance to the Lady Ann; the disguise was excellent.”

“I wish I had seen her,” said Lucy.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE NEW SQUIRE.

“MR. DALE arrived, and with him his pretty wife ; they were but recently married. Not in the least could I trace any resemblance to the Dales of Eddishowe in the Rev. Alan Dale when I first saw him. He was totally different in appearance to the Alan Dale I remember as a boy. His love of riding and hunting was the only point of resemblance.

“As a boy he used to pride himself on his name, and, as he said, ‘proved descent from Robin Hood’s favourite companion, Alan-a-Dale, and with his lineage and name, what could he do but ride and hunt,’ and he carried out the idea. He was exceedingly well-off in point of money without the rich living of Woodnaston, and he immediately, on being settled, began to build stables, and accommodation for his beagles.

“ He has been here some months, and I need not fear his memory will betray me ; for I have spoken to him, and he has been close to me several times, and he speaks to me always as a perfect stranger. He is kind and good, and makes himself liked in the parish ; his preaching, which is impressive, is much admired.

“ A ponderous old-fashioned coach, drawn by two of the fattest of Flemish horses, brings the four Miss Cavendishes to church each Sunday, and they remain the whole day at the Rectory. How pleasant seem these meetings ! I hear them talking and laughing with their friends as they leave the church ; I envy them, I must confess. How cruel have I made my fate, that I alone should be left out ; forced to live a life of loneliness, deception, and secrecy.

“ My father’s words ! Too true were they ; though even he did not anticipate this for me.

“ Mr. Askham has had a seizure. His son, his only remaining son, was sent for, and they feared lest he should not arrive in time to find his father alive. He survived his son’s arrival, however, several days.

“ It was not till after the funeral that I saw the young Squire, at church.

“ When I did first see him he walked past me up the aisle, and of course his back was turned to me. But in coming out of church, when he walked down facing me, an indescribable feeling came over me. I trembled, my knees shook, I was forced to sit down, and I was fascinated with his look.

“ What was it he brought back to my recollection? whose face and figure did I recall? He seemed like the ghost of a former friend, whose real name and appearance I could not recall, though it was on the point of presenting itself to my mind. He passed out, and I saw him no more. I longed to see him again, to discover the cause of my awe at the sight of him, yet I hoped something might occur to save me from the pain I had felt.

“ His appearance haunted me; I dreaded to be alone; I felt quite nervous and unhinged. But my few wants must be attended to. I could not stay at home, and I walked to Farmer Giles's the next day. I was, as usual, received by his

good wife with every mark of respect ; I wonder why ?

“ She asked me if I had seen the young Squire. I said I had. What did I think of him ? Was he not a noble-looking gentleman ? I answered in a bewildered manner in the affirmative. She longed to see his young wife, to whom he had been married a year ago. She was a Miss Tudor of Wales, a cousin of his own ; and so she went on chatting, I giving but short answers.

“ She left the room, and returned bringing in a cup with a beaten-up egg, some sugar and sack (as a home-made wine was still called). She begged me to add these together and drink it ; for she was sure I was over-tired with the walk ; that I was sorrowful, and required it. I gladly accepted it, and soon felt better. After a while I walked home, she sending a boy to carry the butter and eggs for me.

“ The next day she came up to the cottage to see how I was. She found me busy ironing, and immediately she came in she took the iron ‘to help me,’ and remained to finish my work for me, begging me to sit down and rest, which

I was only too glad to do. Then she asked me what I was going to eat. She cooked the meat and toasted the cake I had made, set it all ready for me, and then took her leave, saying she hoped she had not taken too great a liberty. Good, excellent woman, how much kind attention I have to thank her for, and her husband also.

“Are these people always so good to their neighbours? It would be an example to those in higher ranks.

“The boys in the village greatly torment me. They shout at me, and follow me, and call me a witch, and repeat quaint sayings to illustrate their meaning. Some are so ill-conditioned that they take up stones to throw at me; then I turn round and shake my large crutch-stick at them (it was poor John’s), which sends them all away hissing and shouting at me. I did not like this treatment at first, and ever have wondered what put the notion into their heads; but I have considered that this foolish idea of my witchcraft may be a security for me; no one will venture near me after dusk, so I do not

resent it. I laughed at the boys one day for being so silly, and they declared themselves more convinced than ever that I must be a witch, or I should be frightened.

“Poor little benighted children come to my cottage, and are glad of my protection ; but I dare not take them further than the entrance to the village, or they would be set upon by these bullies.

“Children are my solace and delight. I like to have them with me, and to see them at play in the sunshine where my Edgar wished to be.

“Some time has elapsed since I last wrote my journal. People are accustomed to me now, and whether I am walking, or seated beside the Ulsford carrier in his cart, they take no notice of me.

“My first rent day to the young squire is over. I was very nervous as I walked to the Hall ; I cannot get over that feeling of excitement and dread. I entered the audit-room ; but Mr. Askham, who occupied the same place as his father did, allowed me to remain standing near

the door till it was my turn to go up to the table. There were but few seats in the room, and I did not suppose it consistent with my apparent position to take one. I was so tired. At last he motioned me to come to the table. He asked me questions as to who I was, where I lived, and how long I had lived there.

“I thought I should have fallen or fainted before that face and manner, and above all that voice ! Could I believe my ears, my eyes ? Had I lost my senses ? Was not his the face, the look, the manner, and above all, the VOICE, the treasured remembrance of my ONE partner in the dance ? If ever I had heard that voice, I now heard it again. Could I forget it ? No ; it had rung in my ears ever since that night. Oh ! pleasure ! misery ! to hear that sound in reality again.

“All these and many more reflections rushed into my mind together. I got confused ; could scarcely answer. I even answered wrong, and was set right by the bailiff. Mr. Askham said probably I was over-tired from waiting so long, and desired the bailiff to fetch me a glass of

wine. ‘No, water, please,’ I cried, scarcely knowing to whom I spoke. Water was soon brought, and some cake. I took the water, but refused the cake. Mr. Askham said to me, ‘You will come into the dining-hall, where I am now going; you shall sit by me, and have some dinner.’

“This completely broke me down; kind words uttered in *that* voice I could not bear; I burst out into a violent fit of crying and sobbing, saying I must go home. Mr. Askham would not hear of that; he said, if I would not go into the dining-hall with him, I must go to the housekeeper’s room to be taken care of.

“Of the two propositions, going with him suited my still lingering pride best, and I said I would go with him, as he so kindly wished it. He rose and walked down the room. I walked behind him. He desired me to keep by him; he walked to the centre of the cross table, and told me to sit at his right hand. He said to me—

“‘You can remain during the dinner, can you not? After that is over the men stay chatting

some time, but you can leave as early or as late as you please.'

"I could only say, 'Thank you, sir.' I dreaded lest I should forget my position.

"If he had known who I really am, he could not have behaved to me with greater courtesy and kindness; offering me all that was best on the table, and taking care that I was supplied with even more than I required. We were waited upon by the liveried servants, the same who had been in his father's service.

"After dinner he made a short speech to his tenants; it was music to my ears, and I wished it could have lasted any length of time. When he rose, I rose; I was afraid to remain there without his protection. I walked down to the door behind him; then, as he turned to wish me good afternoon, I curtsied, and wished him the same. I felt very frightened and tottering as I walked down the avenue. Mrs. Askham was stopping at the lodge gate in her pony carriage, talking to the woman at the lodge; but fortunately for me she drove off in the opposite direction from the Common before I got to the lodge.

“When I reached home I sat down in a sort of reverie.

“How could it be? How could two people, not connected in any way that I could possibly imagine, be so precisely alike? One hears of mistaken identity, but this is at a distance of years; for Mr. Llewellyn must be an oldish man now, about my own age perhaps, and Mr. Askham is as Mr. Llewellyn was when I knew him in his youth; and although at that distance of time I could not recall with great exactitude each feature of Mr. Llewellyn’s face, Mr. Askham looked to me his exact image—the same eyes, hair, complexion, about the same height, a little taller perhaps, the same gentle manners, and, beyond every other resemblance, that wonderful similitude of voice! To hear those tones once was to remember them for ever.

“It was late in the afternoon. I lighted my fire, put the kettle to boil, and feeling quite overcome with the events of the day, I went to lie down on the bed. Some time after I was awake by a knocking at my door. I got up, hurriedly dressed myself, and went to see who it was.

“Farmer Giles and his kind wife stood there ; they had come over to inquire after me, and had brought me a sack posset, for he said I looked so ill and frightened at the audit dinner, he must bring his wife to see after me. I begged them to come in. Giles went to tie up his horse at the back of the cottage ; I spread my humble board with ‘ parkins ’ (a coarse sort of gingerbread much liked in Yorkshire) which I had made the day before, and other eatables ; Mrs. Giles refilled the kettle, which had almost boiled away, heated the sack posset, and we sat down to supper.

“They talked of the young Squire ; they remarked that I did not like speaking of him, and drew their own conclusions, that I had been so much affected by seeing him in his father’s place. They were all sorry to lose the old Squire, but there could not be a better gentleman than Mr. George ; why, they had known him ever since he was born ; and in fact had all the talk to themselves, with my occasional affirmative or negative to keep it up. They were kindness itself, said they were glad to see me better, and, wishing me good night, drove off in their light

cart. Good souls ! why should they take such an interest in me, and act with such deference ? They would not at first remain to supper, and required much pressing before they would sit down ; yet the cottage is far inferior to their farmhouse.

“ Their visit took away my thoughts for a time, and did me much good ; my mind was tranquilized. I could only wonder at the singular coincidence of likeness, and hoped I might get accustomed to it, or that it might wear off on further acquaintance.

“ The next day, as I was sewing in the sunshine, Mr. Askham rode up. He said he came to inquire after me ; hoped I was recovered from my fatigues of the day before ; inquired about the cottage. Was it in good repair, and comfortable ? Was there, he continued, anything I would like to have added ? Was it not too solitary for me ? and many other questions ; to all of which I gave almost monosyllabic replies, so fearful am I of betraying myself.

“ I afterwards saw him driving in the pony carriage with his wife. What a lively, pleasant

face she has ; not pretty, like Mrs. Dale, but interesting, and her laughing blue eyes would make any one merry."

"You see, mamma, that she found out the likeness in papa to Uncle Ivor directly. And it is very strong, the voice especially. Oh, I am so sorry for her. Her whole ideas seem to have been centred in you, uncle," said Lucy.

"Yes ; so with me. In youth or old age, I have had but one thought—herself. Ours has been a singular fate."

"We all by turns come under her criticism. I do not see why we should not ; but it is curious to read of one's self and one's neighbours so frankly portrayed," said Mr. Dale.

"She has dealt very leniently by us all. She has always some praise to bestow," said Mrs. Askham. "What are you thinking about, George? You look so grave."

"I was thinking of what has just been read, and of my thorough unconsciousness of the pleasure or pain I caused her."

"And I dare say, papa, you thought how

terrible it must be for her to live in constant fear of betraying herself."

"I certainly used to think she was the most silent woman I had ever met. Nothing would make her speak, even when I considered she ought to speak. I quite well remember the audit dinner she mentions."

"And," said Mrs. Askham, "if she passes her remarks upon us, how often have we not done so about her most singular appearance. You told me that day of the audit dinner, George, that you had a sort of 'old Mother Bunch' sitting beside you, with the manners of a lady."

"That was her exact description," said Mr. Dale, "except that she was perfectly upright and well formed, instead of a hump on her back."

"More and more I wish I had seen her," said Lucy.

CHAPTER IX.

VISIT TO THE NURSERY GARDEN.

“ONE day, as I was being jolted along the Ulsford road in the carrier’s cart, Mr. Askham and Mr. Dale passed me on horseback. They both raised their hats to me and smiled. Surely I must have looked comical; the road was very rough, and I was holding on by the side of the cart to keep in it, for I was very nearly tipped out by one deep rut. My stick was jolted out, the wheel of the cart went over it and broke it in half; the carrier got out to return it to me, but I told him to leave it, for it was no longer of any use to me. It was the last of poor John’s effects.

“The man, however, brought it, and said it would light his fire. At first this ponderous stick was carried by me as a protection; now I need one for support, and I bought that day a more conveniently-shaped one in Ulsford.

“It was market day. I always choose market days for my journeys to Ulsford ; it is so crowded with country people that I am less remarkable, especially as so many wear red cloaks like my own ; also my proceedings are not watched, as they would be when the streets are empty. I can go backwards and forwards to the post-office for letters from my kind friend Mr. Trueman ; and then to ‘The Traveller’s Rest’ to write, or for some food, when I know it has no other customers, for I have to be very wary of the scrutiny of my supposed equals.

“Every one at the little Inn is so kind to me that I feel quite independent there. The landlady takes me into her bar, and in the evening makes me a treacle posset whilst I am waiting for the carrier’s cart to take me back. There I am quite safe too from being met by Mr. Askham or Mr. Dale, who come in for magistrate’s duty, but leave before the carrier.

“Whilst I was buying my new stick I asked the shopman where I could buy a rose-tree. He pointed out a man standing near the door, saying he was a market gardener. I went to him ; he

did not notice me nor heed my question. I was turning away, when he caught hold of my arm, saying, ‘Stay a bit, old lady; what are ye wantin’?’

“‘A white rose-tree,’ I answered, disengaging myself from his grasp.

“‘A white rose? If ye’d said a red ’un ye shoold ha’ it.’

“‘No,’ I said, rather fiercely, ‘there are none but white roses for me.’

“‘Ye be raither ancient, I take it, for white roses; ye’d better have red ’uns.’

“‘No,’ I said; ‘if you have no white rose-trees, perhaps somebody else may.’

“‘Not so fast, mother. Who said I hav’n’t got ’un? My little Polly be fond of white roses, and I grow ’un for her; she’d part wi’ ’un, mebbe, if ye be civil. Come along wi’ me, and we’ll see.’

“‘Where are you going to take me? How far is it?’

“‘Just outside the toon, to my garden.’

“‘How long will it take to walk there?’

“‘Not ten minutes.’

“‘I will fetch my stick and go with you,’ said

I, going back to the shop. There were no roses yet in bloom I knew ; but the bare idea of possessing them again was happiness to me.

“The way—it was not a made road—was so rough I could scarcely get along. My clogs slipped off in the ruts ; and the man begged me to take his arm, which I did, and we arrived arm-in-arm at his cottage.

“ ‘ Here, Polly, come hither,’ he cried. ‘ I’ve brought a body to see ye.’

“He took me into a neatly-sanded kitchen, where the peat fire was blazing cheerily, and sat me down on the settle ; there he left me.

“ ‘ Father,’ cried a young girl, as she ran into the room. ‘ Where’s father, please ’m?’ she said, with a bob curtsy.

“ ‘ He went through that door not a minute ago,’ I answered.

“ ‘ Oh, then he’ll see,’ she exclaimed, with a look of distress.

“ ‘ What will he see?’

“ ‘ The cat,’ she cried, and rushed out.

“The gardener came in by the other door immediately after, and asked me to walk into

the garden with him. We went ; it was a large garden planted with forest trees, evergreens, fruit trees, and flowering shrubs of every description. A broad walk, edged each side with flowers, was particularly pleasing to me ; so many years having elapsed since I walked amongst flower-beds.

“The girl came running up to her father with a flushed face and excited manner, crying, ‘Oh, father, have you seen it?’

“‘Seen what, Polly? What are ye in such a taking about?’

“‘Oh, father, the cat.’

“‘What aboon the cat, lass?’

“‘She’s killed outright,’ she cried.

“‘Killed? Who kill’t her?’

“‘I dinno ; the rats or dogs ; she’s dreadful to see,’ she said, sobbing.

“‘Where is she?’

“‘There, by the potting-shed. Oh, do please bury her at once. Come and see.’

“We walked towards the shed, and there lay the poor cat, sadly mauled, almost torn to pieces.

“‘’Twas her mother’s fav’rit cat,’ he said to

me; ‘and we was main fond of she.’ Then, turning to the girl, he added, ‘Why, Poll, there’s only enough to see she wur a tabby. Poor Moxy! yow’s a done for now, poor old puss.’ He took up the cat, and said to me, ‘Ye’ll please, mum, excuse my burying the cat out of the way.’

“I followed him and the girl to the bottom of the garden to the place where she said she had found the dead cat. The gardener dug a hole there, and had just put the carcass in, when what should come leaping through the hedge, and sat down on the border of the hole, but ‘Moxy’ herself, in perfect health and condition!

“‘What, Moxy?’ cried in one voice both the gardener and his daughter; and then they broke out into loud laughter.

“‘Well, this be strange.’ The cat went to rub herself against the gardener’s legs, and the girl caught her up and kissed her vehemently, saying, ‘Oh, Moxy, dear Moxy, I’m so glad you’re not killed.’

“The man filled in the hole, laughing all the while at the idea of Moxy coming to attend her own funeral.

“ ‘ And now, mum,’ said he to me, ‘ we’ll go and see about the roses ; and, Polly, when ye’ve done kissing Moxy, come along too.’ ”

“ When we arrived at the patch of rose-trees he said to me—

“ ‘ Now, mum, say which ye’d like, and Polly shall say if she can part wi’ it.’ ”

“ I chose one, and Polly, in her joy at the recovery of the cat, said I should have two if I liked, and chose a second for me, in case one should die. They would not allow me to pay for them, saying it was Moxy’s gift. The gardener dug them up and carefully packed them in matting, and we returned to the cottage, where I was pressed to drink Moxy’s health in cowslip wine, with a slice of gingerbread of Polly’s making.

“ I then heard a detailed account of the virtues and qualities of the cat, whose fighting powers with the rats that infested the brook at the bottom of the garden had so often been the source of conversation and astonishment to them and their neighbours, that little surprise was evinced when in her old age she was supposed

to be unequal to cope with her enemies, whether rats or dogs.

“The gardener and Polly accompanied me back to Ulsford with my rose-trees. They then kindly took leave of me, and hoped I would ‘give ’em a call’ when I came again; but from that day to this I have never been, nor have I seen the man in the market. I could not take that long ratty walk alone; my stick, doubly necessary for my support, would not suffice for that road.

“I bought a spade. I had never dug the ground, though almost every other sort of manual labour had been more or less an obligation to me since I left my father’s house. ‘Left!’ Ay, *left* my father’s house! How many times have I blushed with shame at my temerity in taking that rash step!

“But the time since then, with the exception of the visits I paid my father and stepmother, is now almost forgotten—passed out of my recollection—unless by a mental effort I bring it back. I live over again the days of my youth, and those of my Edgar, my child, who is ever

present with me in my mind. I hear his voice, though I do not see him ; but the voice never gets beyond his childish utterings when in life, ‘ Come into the sunshine, mother.’

“ When I got back to the cottage I was very tired ; so the carrier took me up to the door, and lifted me down, saying I was ‘ not very burdensome.’ It was not dark, and he offered to put in my rose-trees for me. I gladly accepted his offer. The turf had to be removed, and the ground, which was hard and dry, dug up ; neither of which things could I have done.

“ Of the rose-bushes I put in—now, long ago—the one I had chosen has flourished without any particular care, but all my watering and care could not keep the smaller one alive. I was sorry, for it was a much prettier-looking plant than the one I fixed upon.

“ I have had bunch after bunch of my white roses. It is right that a Thurstane should never be without them. In-doors and out-of-doors they are my delight.”

“I like this story of the rose-tree, mamma. I am so glad you kept and took care of the old one that was really hers.”

“It shall be the parent of all the roses in her garden,” said Mrs. Askham.

CHAPTER X.

THE LAST LEAVES OF THE JOURNAL.

“WINTERS and summers have passed since I last wrote my journal. All seasons of the year are painful to me now. The winter’s cold penetrates to my bones ; I can scarce keep myself warm ; the exertion of doing everything for myself gets greater each year. Yet I have seen poor people much older than I am find no difficulty in going through their daily routine of active life, and never complain.

“My father’s words again ! ‘They are *born* to poverty. You have been nurtured in ease and luxury.’

“Then, if I had but run up the ladder, back to my room, when I hesitated ! I need not now be suffering this compulsory solitude, sometimes almost too hard to bear. It has been terrible in winter. The wind rattles the doors.

I wake up in the dark and fancy it is Tom Lystone come to persecute, if not to rob me. I lie shivering with anxiety, with nothing but my cat to speak to, till the grey winter dawn slowly brightens into daylight so cold and cheerless I could almost wish it were night again. And thus, night after night.

“The summer heat is more trying to my strength than the cold of winter; but summer has the advantage of cheerfulness, and the nights are short. Each summer I think may be my last, that I cannot survive another winter through; still I live on.

“The saving habits I was forced to adopt years ago to keep us from starving have been of use to me; for I know I not only have enough by me for my wants, but to spare; and I see the shop-people look up under their eyes when I give them a guinea or a note to change. So far I am beyond care. And I have settled my few worldly affairs, and sent off my packets to Mr. Trueman. There are many things still I want to write and to arrange, but my head swims when I attempt to concentrate my thoughts.

“I can never feel sufficiently grateful to Mr. Askham for his kind consideration for me. On no occasion has he treated me as the low-born creature I appear to be, and he cannot be aware of the value to me of his gentlemanly conduct. As usual, yesterday, instead of sending me a message about some repairs to the cottage by his bailiff or one of his men, he came himself to speak to me about it; and if he had known I am by birth[?] a lady he could not have acted more courteously. He was so anxious that I should be comfortably lodged; tried in every way to induce me to tell him what I would really like to be done; was much afraid I suffered from the cold; asked me if I would not prefer to live in a more sheltered place. He was sure I felt the cold most severely last winter in that bitter weather; he had often thought of me during the heavy gales and sweeping storms of snow and sleet, and Mrs. Askham had begged him to ask me if she could in any way add to my comfort.

“I blessed him in my heart; but I could only say I should want for nothing when the roof was

repaired. The charm of that well-remembered voice, with the sight of that face, so extraordinarily like the one which has haunted me with pleasurable recollections from the days of my youth, was a solace that surpassed any other. It takes me back to myself; it restores me to my proper position; it makes me forget the many ills and adversities I have suffered. I am no longer in a poor cottage, in a charity garb; but in my proper home of former days. Mr. Askham must find me a dull person to speak to; I am so absorbed in listening to him, that I have nothing to say for myself, even if it were not for the caution I have to observe in speaking. He takes off his hat to me with a bow when he leaves, and I make him the curtesy I am now so accustomed to offer as my tribute to supposed higher birth.

“When he was gone I stood riveted to the spot, at the door, till he was out of sight. Then, how utterly lonely I felt, and always feel, after these few-and-far-between interviews with those of my own station in life. The Miss Cavendishes have been to see me more than once; but I

never encourage visitors. Amelia, the youngest, would patronize me ; that stirs my pride. Charlotte, amiable woman, would take kindly interest in me. Miss Jane asks me abundant questions which give me trouble to evade. But Miss Cavendish is full of good sense, and I would gladly turn to her with every feeling of confidence and affection if it were not for the peculiarity of my position.

“ Seeing that I take great care and pride in my white rose bush, she invited me to take a seat in her coach and go with her to see her garden ; an offer I thankfully but steadily declined. But she has brought me both fruit and flowers, regretting I would not go to see them growing. She is a true lady, but I am not at ease when I am with her, fearing in word or deed that I shall forget my assumed position.

“ The old adage of the tangled web we weave for ourselves when we practise deceit, is ever present to me. Silence or monosyllabic sentences are all that I am permitted to use ; for if any one should even guess the truth and spread it, as might naturally be the case, all my independence,

my safety, would be gone. ‘The news,’ as it would be considered, would be set afloat—how quickly I can scarcely tell. It might come to the ears of my greatest enemy, Tom Lystone ; and I should be insulted, cheated, robbed, as in the days of my miserable married life. My father’s words have all come true, and have stopped short of the climax. Even he could not imagine the last degradations that have been forced upon me.”

“I am so glad, papa, that you treated her so kindly. See how she valued it.”

“My love, I could not have done otherwise. There was a dignity and grace about her which demanded every consideration. She was a lady, even when dressed in a ‘charity garb,’ as she expresses it.”

CHAPTER XI.

THE CONCLUDING MEMORANDUM.

“ I HAVE sent off my packet to dear Mr. Trueman. How good he has ever been to me ! I fear my packets and letters to him will be at longer intervals from henceforth. Writing is a great exertion to me ; and when I take them to the Ulsford post I do not easily recover from the fatigue and bruises I receive from the roughness of the road and the carrier’s cart, now that I am getting far in years.

“ I dread another journey to Ulsford.

“ Oh, my weary limbs ! my weary mind ! But, thank God ! I have still the blessings of sight and hearing left.

“ At long intervals my journal drags on. It is not many days since I wrote my letter to Mr. Askham ; writing becomes so laborious to me that I did well to write it then ; except for that

letter, it is many months since I put pen to paper.

“The cold, the cold! how I suffer from the cruel wintry blasts. Yet how beautiful are the hoar frosts, glittering like jewels on the shrubs; the snow, the ice, all so lovely to view, but so bitter to bear when old age creeps on and the vitality of life is passing away. The snow-wreaths a few days ago were like shrouds—ah, the purest of shrouds—over the gorse bushes. I sat at the window and watched the great snow-flakes till I fell asleep. I dreamed that my Edgar was at play under a snow-wreath, and I went and lay down beside him. It was bliss unspeakable till he heaped the snow over me, and I felt the cold on my face. I woke up frightened. I found daylight passing away, my fire nearly out, and I remembered I had but a few sticks left to rekindle it.

“In the autumn Mr. Askham rode up to my door and told me some brushwood that was cut in his woods should be left for me by his carter, and some peat should be stacked for me, to save me the trouble, as he kindly said, of

ordering it for myself, as I had been ill with a severe cold. He came again on horseback, and saw that it was properly put away for me, desiring me to keep indoors the while. When he and his men had left, I went out to fetch some peat, and found a large stack nicely piled up and the faggots under the little shed. I have not seen him since to thank him, but he has my heartfelt gratitude for it, and above all for the delicate manner in which he bestows his gifts, always as appropriate as they are kind.

“The faggots are nearly gone; the first dry day I must go to the wood he indicated and fetch a few more sticks, unless I can meet with some one who will get them for me; but few are the people who cross the Common in this season.

“My Edgar’s spirit lures me on to ‘go into the bright sunshine;’ he is ever present with me. The frost is hard upon the ground and slippery; the greenish hue of the clouds in the horizon indicates snow at some not distant period, and I must haste to the quarry wood for some sticks before I am again snowed up. I had sore

trouble to open my door some days ago from the drift ; this may not happen again, but I will make certain of my sticks.

“ The snow is beginning to fall. I must away ; my Edgar’s voice calls me, ‘ Come, mother.’

“ I go—I go—when I re——”

“ It must have been at this time she was lost in the snow,” said Mr. Dale. “ Probably she only put away her writing to fetch the faggots from near the quarry where she was found.”

“ Who found her ? ” asked Lucy.

“ John Ferner, who went to his work in the quarry when the snow was melting. He saw a piece of her red cloak sticking out of the snow-drift, and went to see what it was. He pulled down the snow, and found the body in a sitting posture, the hands in her lap, and a bundle of faggots at her feet. The general opinion was that she sat down on the stone to rest, and had been overcome by that sleep or unconsciousness, brought on by severe frost, and so had died.”

“ What a dreadful death,” said Lucy.

“ No, I should imagine it to be the easiest of

deaths ; the placid countenance showed she had no suffering, and she sat in an easy posture."

"What became of her clothes?"

"They were completely saturated by the melting snow and spoiled, and were only fit to be burnt. Mrs. Williams at the 'King's Head' has, I believe, her wedding ring and her stick," said Mr. Dale.

"George, should we not beg Mrs. Williams to give the ring and the stick for the cottage?" asked Mrs. Askham.

"Yes. We must collect all the personal relics we can."

"There are her Bible and her desk."

"We will look over her effects, and select those most proper for the cottage."

Colonel Llewellyn and his brother had been sitting together in conversation since the reading was finished.

CHAPTER XII.

LUCY MEETS AN OLD FRIEND.

MR. AND COLONEL LLEWELLYN returned to Wales. It was expected that the buildings would be finished and ready to be opened in the autumn, when they would return to Woodnaston. In the mean time the Colonel was to make up his mind as to the tablets and inscriptions.

Mr. Askham with his wife and Lucy went to York, where there was to be a great gathering of county families, and numerous guests. His first visit was to Mr. Trueman. He found the poor old man, now over ninety years of age, had had a fit two days before, and had remained unconscious since.

Lucy and her mother went about the city trying to find out Monk Street, where Ann's first years of unhappy married life had been passed ; they said they should like to see where

poor Ann had lived. But Monk Street had been destroyed in the city improvements; no trace of it could be found. "It lay somewhere in this direction, but those houses cut through it," said their cicerone.

Next they went to the Minster. Lucy had a romantic turn of mind, and to please her, her mother lingered with her at the western door, talking over Ann's exit from it with her weeping friend Jessie, unconscious of the Colonel, then the young Lieutenant Llewellyn, being near. Then they went to the "King's Head." They found the Inn in its primitive state, and still the best in the city. But the old proprietors were of course dead and gone long ago, and there was no one there who remembered even the name of the Becklea family.

They questioned Mr. Thomas Trueman about the road to get to the Becklea almshouses, and he promised, if he could, to find out and let them know. But no such houses were known to exist, and he could only tell them of the villages in that direction, and direct them to the one nearest the point they wished to go to.

It proved to be the right one ; for, after many inquiries, at last an old man told them that what once had been almshouses was now a farmhouse and buildings. Some of the old part had been pulled down to make the alterations, but he believed a good bit still remained. They went there, and to their disappointment found that an old stack of chimneys was really the only part in its original state ; all the rest had been so pulled to pieces or altered as to be unrecognizable as the former almshouses. The bridge mentioned by Mrs. Page in her letter had been destroyed, and no trace of it left.

Another day they went to Eddishowe. It was a long journey, and was equally unsuccessful ; for the Church had been rebuilt after destruction by fire, and was now a modern, ugly-looking edifice. They were doomed to be equally unlucky with regard to the Rectory, which had been reconstructed. So they returned from their fruitless expedition, tired and disappointed.

Their time at York always passed pleasantly ; they had so many friends in the neighbourhood.

Although it was in the summer-time, when York was generally empty, it was now full of the usual fashionables, who were there for the rejoicings on the coming of age of Sir Marmaduke Sheepshanks, who had large possessions in the county, and seemed destined to hold a high position. Balls and parties were to be given in York and the neighbouring country houses. The festivities began with a ball in the York Assembly Rooms.

Mr. Askham had a good house in York, and was to give a ball and parties also.

Lucy was not in good spirits. She declared she would rather not have come at that particular time. She liked York, she said, better without a great influx of strangers. She did not care for dancing.

"Now don't be foolish, Lucy," said her mother; "any one, to hear you talk, would think you were an old maid who had had disappointments in life."

"Well, mamma, I suppose I am getting to be like that, though I have not had any disappointments."

“ I beg you will behave like other people, and not take such fancies into your head.”

Mr. and Mrs. Askham and Lucy were amongst the early arrivals at the Assembly Rooms ; they had a number of old acquaintances to greet. The master of the ceremonies, Mr. Hoptonville, came up to Mrs. Askham and Lucy, and conversed with them.

“ We expect,” he said, “ a great influx of guests from the neighbouring houses, and others who are strangers. All the world is to be here, Miss Askham.”

“ Do you know who are the strangers expected ? ” asked Mrs. Askham.

“ I have heard several names which do not belong to the county, but there is one name that used to be so familiar, as almost to be considered belonging to it.”

“ Whom do you mean ? ”

“ The Baronet of Culdover Park. Do you know the young heir ? ”

“ The name has been so little heard for some years that it had slipped my memory. Is he Sir Rollo Norman, like his predecessors ? ”

“No, madam, that is not his name. It is an uncommon one which I cannot recall.”

“I cannot help you,” said Mrs. Askham. “The late Sir Rollo Norman we used to know very well ; but his house has so long been shut up—a dozen years, at least—from his illness and living in London, that I do not even know who has succeeded him.”

“A very distant relation, who had to take the name on succeeding, and I am uncertain as to his Christian name.”

“It should be Rollo. There have been so many in succession so called, that one can hardly associate it with any other.”

“I think I should have remembered if it had been. I shall ask Miss Askham if she will allow me the honour of introducing him to her.”

“Oh, no ; please don’t,” said Lucy.

“Nonsense, Lucy ; I am not going to let you shut yourself up in this way. You will meet him, probably, at every house, and it is right you should be introduced to him. Yes, Mr. Hoptonville, my daughter will be pleased to make his acquaintance.”

“He will know no one here, he tells me; so, Miss Askham, it will be a kindness in you to allow me to introduce him to you.”

“I do not wish for any new acquaintances. Why should he fix upon me?”

“Nonsense, Lucy; how rude you are.”

“I did not intend to be rude, mamma; but *I do not care for dancing*, and there are plenty of others who will be much more agreeable partners.”

“Indeed, Miss Askham, I should be particularly pleased to introduce this gentleman; he is young, though not a boy, and in the army, just returned from abroad, so that I think you will find him a pleasant partner. Of course I cannot speak of his proficiency in the dance, although I dare say he has learned abroad the new-fashioned dance, the waltz. I shall then, with your permission, introduce him to you, Miss Askham.”

“Yes,” said Lucy, with an absent look.

Mr. Hoptonville then left them.

“Mamma,” she said, after a pause, “I wish I were at home.”

“Do you feel ill, my love?”

“No, not ill; but I do not care to dance with any but my old friends.”

“How foolish you are, Lucy; I do not know what to think of you.”

The room became crowded. Mrs. Askham was busy chatting with numerous acquaintances. Lucy sat still in her place, content to speak to those who came to talk to her.

She had sat there some time; dancing was going on the whole length of the room, and no one had invited her to dance. Her mother looked at her sometimes, and was sorry to see the sad expression of her face; she herself being completely happy, as her sprightly nature always made her in society, and going from one to another amongst her old friends, was at last separated from her daughter for a considerable time.

In the mean time Mr. Hoptonville came up to Lucy, followed by a gentleman in uniform. Lucy at once felt that this was the stranger to whom she was to be introduced, and scarcely looked up. The usual ceremony was gone through, and Sir Gerard Norman spoke.

She looked up at him, and her breath left her. Who was it stood before her with face beaming with pleasure? who was it indeed? Could her senses tell true? Was it not her old friend Mr. Doyne? Even Mr. Hoptonville could not fail to see the difference of expression in her face, and smiled. In his capacity of master of ceremonies, how many of the like scenes had he not witnessed?

After a few preliminary greetings, Lucy said to Sir Gerard—

“Where did you go after I last saw you?”

“My leave was out, and I joined my regiment; but I afterwards exchanged into one that was ordered to India, whence I was called home to inherit my cousin’s title and estate. It is more than a year since his death. The news took eight months to reach me, and I have only been a month in England.”

Lucy told him of the master of ceremonies wishing to introduce him. He smiled.

“The fact is,” he said, “I met Hoptonville at my friend O’Brien’s rooms yesterday, and asked who was likely to be at this ball. He mentioned

a number of people I did not know, and at last your name ; when I asked him to introduce me, as the only way I could imagine of our meeting again, for I feared after so long a time I might be forgotten."

Mrs. Askham came up to them. "Mr. Doyne?" she exclaimed.

"No, mamma ; Sir Gerard Norman," said Lucy, blushing.

"I am so glad to see you again," she said to him ; "but you may thank me for your re-introduction to Lucy, who for some unknown reason steadily refused to be introduced to you as Sir Gerard Norman, or any other *stranger*," she said, laughing.

He looked at Lucy, who became crimson, and smiled.

"I am no longer a stranger, Miss Askham, I hope. You will forgive my *ruse* for giving you a surprise."

Mr. Askham also was glad to see him again, and invited him to his house. "All the world" were wishing to be introduced to the new baronet, who, thanks to the avarice of his pre-

decessor, had come into a very large fortune as well as a handsome estate.

“How did it happen?” asked Mr. Askham.

“The old gentleman and I had the same great-grandfather; my grandfather was the second son, and changed his name for the property in Ireland.”

“I always thought Sigismund left a son.”

“Yes; but he was but a baby when his father died, and did not survive him a year. I did not know of the child’s death, which happened three or four years ago, till I was summoned home as the heir.”

“So now you are at liberty.”

“Not quite; I shall have to return to my regiment for a short time to get my promotion; but I have six months’ leave in England, and that will be mainly occupied in looking after Culdover, which is in a sad state of dilapidation from roof to cellar. It is well the old gentleman left me plenty of money to pay for his neglect. I never saw a place so nearly a ruin. Buckets have to be placed in the rooms to catch the rain. There is a great rent all down the

east side of the house, and some of the windows cannot be opened. The cellars are full of water in wet weather ; and the steward, who has lived in the house, says that even the kitchen, which he has tried to keep whole, is not water-tight."

"The gardens used to be renowned."

"They may be so now for their emptiness of everything save weeds, which are nearly as tall as I am. Only fancy ! in that which was formerly the large kitchen garden I found a donkey grazing, with a plentiful supply of thistle to suit his taste."

"Dear, dear ! What, was nothing left in those spacious gardens ? And are the ranges of hothouses also in ruins ?"

"They are entirely gone. But one hothouse was kept up and a small piece of inner garden, to supply the old man with fruit and vegetables, which were sent to London. The steward also had a small piece of garden close to the house, which had formerly been a flower garden ; but not a flower was to be seen except a few roses down the long walk, and the grand old magnolia that covers the south front."

"You have enough on your hands to set this in order."

"Yes; I have ordered a few rooms to be made habitable for myself, and shall have to live like a hermit in the midst of the workmen."

"I hope the fine old cabinets and pictures have escaped injury."

"Fortunately they have; and the books are, as far as I could see in the short time I was there, very little, if at all, injured. The steward took the precaution of having everything moved out of the east rooms, and where the water came in; so that the best part of the house is closely packed, and looks like the rooms of a broker's shop."

"You must come and see us at Woodnaston in the autumn. You will meet your old friends Colonel and Mrs. Lewis, and the brothers from Cwm Castle. And, meantime, you had better come and dine with us to-morrow."

"Thank you, I cannot do that,—I mean, dine with you to-morrow,—for I am already engaged to O'Brien."

Very often, however, he met, and was the

guest of the Askhams. What could he wish better than to be in Lucy's society? and was she not happy also? Before she returned to Woodnaston *their* tale of love had been told, and he was her accepted lover. The Gerard Doyne whom Mr. and Mrs. Askham had liked so well in Wales could not fail to be acceptable now that he had, in addition to his former good qualities, twofold of the world's riches.

It must not, however, be supposed that Lucy's parents laid snares to catch the rich young baronet. Lucy, and Lucy only, had been his magnet from the time of meeting her at the wicket at Cwm, that fine morning when she forgot to cry "Tally Ho" on seeing the fox; and now he claimed her for his bride as the reward of his constancy. With many evasions on so delicate a subject, she was at last forced to admit that recollections of him were not altogether absent when she so stoutly declined to be introduced to any strangers, alleging as a reason that she "did not care for dancing."

Mr. Askham remained at York about three weeks. In that time old Mr. Trueman had

died, and Mr. Askham had attended his funeral. He was sorry the good old man had not lived to hear of Ann's "buildings" being completed, for as long as he was able he had taken the greatest interest in every particular concerning them, and had seen and discussed all the plans and drawings. His son said it was the only thing that amused him, and he would have them all placed before him time after time, and talk about them.

When Mr. Askham went to see him for the last time, he was already speechless, but made signs with the hand he could still use that he would like him to come near, and touched his ear, to let him know either that he was not deaf, or was willing to hear him speak. Whether he could understand what was said, or not, Mr. Askham could not tell; but he spoke to him as if he could, and his son said he thought it gave him pleasure to hear what was told him. Mr. Askham never saw him again in life.

A very large number of persons followed him to the grave, for he was universally respected. Mr. Askham's carriage joined many others in the procession.

CHAPTER XIII.

MR. ROYLE PAYS ANOTHER VISIT TO THE LADIES OF RAVENSCRAG.

AGAIN Mr. Royle went to visit the Misses Cavendish, and to his great joy the two elder sisters were alone. He was no sooner seated than he began his gossiping inquiries.

“Well, ma’am,” he said, pronouncing the latter word with the broadest accent, “we have the mystery of the old woman—I beg her pardon” (he said, with mock politeness); “lady, I should say—solved at last in every particular but the reason of her selecting Askham as her heir, and Dale as his coadjutor in carrying out her plans.”

“Mr. Dale she remembered as a boy when she was young. His father and mother lived near, and were intimate with her father and family.”

"Oh, indeed! Dale and Askham are so confoundedly secret in all their doings, no one ever hears a word from them."

"I think they were wise not to make her and her affairs the subject of public talk."

"Why should her affairs be of so much importance? But I wonder, if they were old friends, they did not recognize each other sooner," he said.

"Her disguise was so complete."

"Why should she disguise herself? what folly!"

"She no doubt had her reasons," said Miss Jane.

"It is reported that Colonel Llewellyn is a relation of hers, and therefore put up her tomb. Is it so?"

"I do not know. But he is related to Mr. Askham," replied Miss Cavendish.

"The likeness proclaims that. It is about the most extraordinary I ever saw; and the voice is precisely the same. He spoke to me, and I thought it was Askham."

"How long have you been home?" inquired

Miss Cavendish, trying to get rid of his questions ; for she knew the cross-examination she would be subjected to, to satisfy his curiosity.

“ We only returned a few days before the laying of the foundation - stone of the new buildings.”

“ What was going on at York ? ”

“ Ah, you left so early that the new wharf was not begun. Only fancy, what a pot of money the old lady would have had if she had been alive ! The Corporation are to pay rent for the piece of her field, and an enormous rent too ; and the value of the ground for building purposes is increasing every day.”

“ That will be a great benefit to the school and hospital.”

“ But for the anticipation of this increase of value, I suppose the trustees could not have erected them ; at any rate in their present proportions. The hospital I hear is to have eight beds in two large rooms—they will never be filled—with a common hall, board room, and matron’s room, on the ground floor—and all this for tramps ; and I cannot see the use of having

a girls' school. The old dames' schools do quite well enough."

"It will be better for the elder girls to have a school of their own to go to, to learn writing and other things, which they have hitherto learned from John Rule, whom I never considered a good master for them."

"No," observed Miss Jane; "he disliked teaching them so much that he had not common patience with them."

"I am not surprised at that; nor would you be, Miss Jane, if you saw how unmanageable they are. I have been in there sometimes and have been quite shocked at their bad behaviour. Rule could do nothing with them. They giggled and whispered the whole time, and set him at defiance."

"It was his own fault. They behave very well with the dames, and improve greatly under their tuition."

"Well, I think Askham and Dale have enough on their hands to manage these new fads. Have you observed," he said, addressing Miss Cavendish, "how much Askham is improved in health lately?"

“We were speaking of it only the other day.”

“Yes, the little excitement and occupation of looking after the old lady’s affairs have done him a deal of good. I have not noticed that odd, vague look and manner that he occasionally put on when he seemed absorbed in thought, and looked straight ahead as if he was looking into futurity.”

“Those absent fits were very distressing.”

“I think his head must have been affected by that sad illness years ago, when he was smitten by the tree.”

“His arm was certainly seriously hurt. It was only last week that he was still groaning with the pain in it, and could not carve at dinner.”

“Well, but I have never seen him carve since the accident. The joint of meat has always been taken to the sideboard,” said Mr. Royle.

“Oh yes, he does sometimes,” returned Miss Jane, “but he often cannot raise his arm when the pain is great. No doubt the weather affects it.”

“This puts me in mind of the other misfortune

on that same day, which seems to have died out of remembrance," said Miss Cavendish, "but was brought back by the arrival of one of poor Will Stokes's companions. Did you hear of that, Mr. Royle?"

"No. It happened probably before my return."

"Yes, it did," said Miss Jane. "You remember Will Stokes?"

"Certainly, but I too had almost forgotten him. What about him? His death will never be accounted for."

"David Wads, who had enlisted as a soldier, came back on leave, and on his way home went to see his old friend Will Stokes. He knew nothing of his death, and Mary—Ferner, she is now—attacked him like a fury, accusing him of being the murderer of her husband, and showed him the knobbed stick which lay beside Stokes when he was found. Wads thought she was mad."

"What a stick that was! I remember it."

"Wads said he saw Will Stokes cut the stick, and that he had threatened to use it upon some

one, he would not say whom. He was in a bad temper, and Wads left him, going to Ulsford, where he enlisted."

"But that does not prove that he did not kill him. We ought to have an examination of Wads on the subject."

"He is gone. I wanted to see him, for he was a nice lad," said Miss Cavendish.

"But we must send for him; for although so many years have elapsed since the murder, we are bound to find the perpetrator, if possible."

"Surely he would not have gone to Ashen-croft, inquiring for Will Stokes, if he had murdered him?"

"It may be bravado only; and his short stay looks bad. It looks as if he were afraid to remain in the neighbourhood."

"Selina, did you look at it in that light?"

"No, Jane, nor can I now."

"You ladies have not the keen eyes of a magistrate."

"Keen eyes!" said Miss Jane. "What sort of eyes would you call them of a magistrate who took out a search warrant against the wrong

man? Were they keen eyes? That happened the other day."

"That was a blunder."

"And it would be a worse blunder to take up Wads."

"I have heard my father say that in public affairs a blunder was often a crime," said Miss Cavendish.

"It certainly may amount to that in very grave cases; but, dear me! if people are to be judged in that way, how many criminals there would be! Few would be exempt. But about that old lady's disguise. Did she give no clue to the reason of her adopting it?"

"I do not know. She was extremely reticent about everything connected with herself."

"Did she tell no one? not even one of these old friends of hers?"

"I never heard that she did."

"Not even Askham or Dale?"

"Not that I ever heard; and after all, what does it signify to them or to any one else what style of dress she chose to adopt?"

"It has a sinister look, going about in disguise. Was her name equally a disguise?"

"I fancy so."

"But impersonating an *alias* is not a very ladylike thing to do."

"She was a perfect lady in all her ways, by whatever name she was called."

"I can't exactly deny that; but as far as I saw, which was not much," rejoined Mr. Royle, "I found her rather a repulsive person than otherwise. She was as well behaved as most persons, though I should never have taken her for more than she appeared to be."

"Her history was a romantic one, no doubt."

"Do you know her history?"

"I cannot say I do."

"Why does Colonel Llewellyn take so prominent a part with regard to her? Putting up a tomb; laying the foundation-stone; making a well."

"He knew her in former days, I believe."

"And so did Askham, I suppose."

"I never heard that."

"Come, now we have two of her old friends found—Dale and Colonel Llewellyn—how very odd that they should have aided and abetted her

in her incognito ! And it is only after so many years that they publicly recognize her ! ”

“ It does seem strange,” said Miss Jane.

“ More than strange, for it looks as if there had been some plot.”

“ Plot, Mr. Royle ! How can you use that word in connection with either Mr. Askham, Mr. Dale, or Colonel Llewellyn ? ”

“ I beg pardon, ma’am, I did not mean any offence.”

“ Surely not, sir, but it was a hard word to use. Do you not remember how often her relations were advertised for ; and how the Corporation of York also advertised for the owner of the meadow now found to have belonged to her, without in either case an answer ? ”

“ Yes, ma’am, I remember it, and the latter we talked over, I remember, one day in this very room. But the curious part of the story is, that it was not found to be in the name of ‘ Pendle,’ but in some other name—I forget what at this moment ; but when at York I heard several questions and surmises as to whether she could have belonged by marriage to

a person or persons of very ill repute, formerly, in York, of the name mentioned in the deed."

"We heard the same," said Miss Jane.

"We heard nothing to *her* discredit, Jane."

"All the same, ma'am, if that was the case it might have been the reason for her taking an *alias*."

"Indeed, sir, I cannot tell."

"She was a miser too. Only think of her having all those rich things hidden away in that miserable hut."

"We do not know that they were all there."

"Where else could they be? Her plate and jewels must be worth a good deal of money; and she had some valuable books too, I heard."

"No common person could have inherited those things."

"Had it not been for the two wills, she might have been accused of stealing them."

"Oh dear, how dreadful!" exclaimed Miss Jane.

"Such an idea never entered any one's head," said Miss Cavendish, in a stately manner. "To speak to her for only five minutes was sufficient

assurance that such an act could not be hers."

"I am sorry again to have given offence, ma'am, but I only repeated the general opinion. For as long as this secrecy is kept up there will be '*on ne dees*,' as the French say," and he laughed.

"It will all be cleared up some day, no doubt; but, being 'the last of her race,' as we read on her tomb, it is difficult to discover."

"There is her husband's family."

"Yes, sir; but from all accounts, no one would wish to refer to them."

"Then I suppose they were considered 'beneath her,' as the saying is."

"No doubt."

"Well, perhaps she deserved what she got—evidently something she did not like—or why take an *alias*? But dear me, how long I have been taking up your time, ladies; I will wish you good morning," and he left.

When he got home, he entered his wife's room laughing loudly, and cracking his whip, saying —

“I’ve pumped the old girls. Ha, ha, ha. Between them I’ve got out some of the old woman’s history.”

“You really are quite vulgar, Jos.”

“And what are you, pray, missis? ‘The Lady Maria,’ perhaps; as the old woman was ‘the Lady Ann!’ Pshaw! the Lady Fiddlesticks! I say. So it appears the story we heard in York is true, and the man she married was a disreputable fellow, well known for his chicaneries, forgeries, and anything else bad. By jingo! she must have had a bad time of it. No wonder she kept herself so secret, and adopted an *alias*. Twice, Maria, I was near getting into a scrape with the old girls; they take her part through thick and thin—‘birds of a feather,’ you know. I think it is foolish beyond all measure for Askham and Dale to keep her story so confoundedly secret. Of course they must know it quite well.”

“Well, Jos, what does it signify to you, or to any one?”

“It signifies a great deal, as she has made herself so conspicuous. ‘The old ladies said that Askham, Dale, and Colonel Llewellyn were old

friends of hers; but there did not seem to be much friendship amongst them, or why should she have lived alone in that hut, with no one to visit or notice her? A nice sort of friendship that! And why should the Colonel take the most prominent part?"

"Perhaps he was an old lover."

"A cast-off lover, eh? What a compliment to him! She cast him off to take that low fellow, a tinker or a tailor! Ha, ha, ha. Well, Maria, you have finished up the story well."

"I never said so, Jos."

"Well, I said it for you, Mrs. R.; it does not much signify."

"Whom did you see?"

"The two old girls only. 'Amelia, dear sister,' was not there, or she would have spoilt all the fun."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE OPENING OF THE THURLESTANE BUILDINGS.

THE time came when the Thurlestone Buildings were to be opened. No letter had been received from Colonel Llewellyn, who was to have been the principal person in the ceremony. An increase of his illness was much feared, for nothing short of that would have kept him away. So Mr. Askham decided to open them himself.

Mr. Dale suggested that at the luncheon a short account of the lady who founded them should be given, for so many exaggerated and false stories had been spread about her, that it would be well to relate her true history in a condensed form.

“ You can easily do that, Askham.”

“ Well—yes—I will think about it—I will think it over. If I fail you can come to my assistance.”

“You will not require aid from me; you used to be a very fluent speaker.”

“Ah!—used to be—but I do not know what I am now; for if that wearying pain comes on through some inadvertent movement of my arm, I shall be stopped at once and not able to continue.”

“Do not think about it.”

“Without giving it a thought it almost takes my breath away. It is quite wearing me out.”

On the day fixed all the neighbourhood assembled, and in due form Mr. Askham declared the hospital and school open for patients and for scholars. The matron was in her place in the former, the school-master and mistress in the school. The people were shown all over the premises, “Mother Pendle’s” cottage being continually crowded. The furniture, which Mr. Askham had so carefully kept for the expected heirs, had been cleaned up and placed in its original position; but of course the cupboards were empty of their former valuable contents. The bed was a special attraction.

The luncheon was served in the common hall,

a large room in the hospital; but not being found large enough for the whole company, the Rector had benches and tables brought from the boys' school and placed in the entrance hall, and the folding doors opening out wide, made it but one apartment. There were none but joyful faces round the tables, and all enjoyed the excellent repast given them by Mr. Askham with a hearty welcome.

Cheers followed, for Mr. Askham and Mr. Dale. The latter returned thanks for himself and Mr. Askham, the kind donor of the feast, and begged their attention for a short history which he wished to give them of their benefactress, the lady who had given them these buildings.

After more cheers, Mr. Askham, who placed himself so that the people in each room could hear him, addressed them.

"My friends," he said, "I think this is a fitting occasion for me to give you some account of the kind lady who by her will has founded these buildings. Many here will remember her, although it is some years since she passed away."

“Yes, sir,” was heard from many voices.

“You will remember her singular appearance, in an ancient garb, a charity dress of the last century.” (“Ay, sir.”) “And you may remember that, notwithstanding that charity garb, she had the manners and speech of a thorough lady.”

“Ay, that she had,” said both Farmer Giles and his wife.

“Many of you, I know, remarked it in her lifetime. I shall never forget how her dignity of manner and ladylike tone of voice surprised me, though she never said more than two or three words together. Indeed, I think it struck most people.”

“I cannot say I ever noticed it,” said Mr. Royle.

“We were much struck by it,” said Miss Cavendish.

“So were we,” said Mrs. Dale.

“You can always tell a lady, my wife and I said from the first,” said Mr. Vyal, “though she looks ever so poor; but we found others didn’t think so much of her.”

“I know many people in Ulsford remarked it,” continued Mr. Askham. “I had to go there to make inquiries concerning her, at all times accompanied by Mr. Dale ; and we heard numerous anecdotes of her, all tending to illustrate her dignity and graceful manners. The people there surmised she was more than she appeared to be according to her dress. But now I must tell you who she was. She was one of an illustrious old family, who had fought for their King and country, many of whom had fallen in battle in the service of their King. Her father was the second son of the Earl of Becklea ; and was the Rector of Eddishowe. The two last Earls were his brothers. He died before them, and with them the title became extinct ; whilst owing to the extravagance of the last Earl all the estates had to be sold. She was always called the Lady Ann ; it was the custom of the period to call all ladies of noble families ‘My Lady,’ though had she lived at the present time she would have been called simply Miss Thurlestane. Her residence was chiefly in the Earl her grandfather’s house, where she lived in the greatest

splendour. She had everything she could want or wish, and it was the same in her father's house. She could have no idea what poverty or meanness were. All her relatives were kind and good to her; but she had a wilful disposition, and having formed a romantic attachment for a young man, her junior by several years, and much beneath her in birth, whom she found in a fit or in a fainting state on the seashore, she insisted on marrying him against the consent of her father; in fact, she eloped with him, for her father would never have consented to such a degrading marriage. This sad step was the beginning of all her woes. He behaved ill to her. He had a brother, a notoriously bad fellow, who, making her husband, whose weakness was his great fault, his tool, robbed and cheated her of most of her money, and used the most insulting language to her besides. Her husband on his death-bed told her of this, and begged her to be on her guard against him—Tom Lystone was his name."

"Ah," said Mr. Royle, "that must be the fellow we heard of in York."

“No doubt,” continued Mr. Askham. “Her husband’s name was John Lystone. They had but one child to live any time. He survived his father a few months. His name was Edgar; and, Mr. Royle, you may remember that name in connection with hers, Ann Lystone, as the owners of that meadow, ‘the Willow Close,’ which has turned out to be such a valuable property, near York, part of which is rented from us, the trustees of these buildings, by the Corporation of York.”

“I remember hearing of it, but the name had escaped my memory,” replied Mr. Royle.

“It was,” continued Mr. Askham, “on account of the persecution she suffered from this Tom Lystone, of which she dreaded the recurrence, that by way of not being recognised she assumed the dress she wore here—it was the dress of the old women of the almshouses on her grandfather’s estate at Becklea; they were the old servants of the family. The almshouses were built by her great-grandmother, who was a Cornish heiress, and at whose command the dress was not to be altered from that worn

at the time of the institution of the charity, about a hundred years ago, or a little more. In order also not to be traced by him, she took part of the name of one of her great-grandmother's estates in Cornwall, Pendlebury Castle ; so she called herself ' Mother Pendle,' or ' Ann Pendle,' as you remember. The rest of her history and her sad end you know—lost in the snow—for nearly six weeks lying buried in the quarry pit ! We suppose she sat down to rest, after gathering some sticks ; that the sleep brought on by excessive cold seized her—that sleep which ends in death, peaceful and painless, to those who are attacked by it. But very few shillings were found when her house was searched, and Mr. Dale benevolently paid all her last expenses."

"Were all her clothes destroyed by the snow?" asked Mr. Royle.

"Yes."

"If you please, sir," said Mrs. Wright of the "King's Head" Inn, "I have her stick and her wedding-ring ; and I thought just now that I should offer them to you for her cottage, if you'd like to have them."

“Thank you, we should. I think they will be well placed there, especially her stick,” said Mr. Askham.

“Then, sir, I will send them up to you.”

“Her clogs,” said Mr. Royle, “could not be spoiled.”

“Yes, although they were of wood,” said Mr. Dale. “Perhaps they were very old ones ; but they had almost come to pieces, so were burnt, like the rest of her clothes.”

“Her bonnet,” said Miss Cavendish, “was quite a curiosity.”

“Yes, ma’am,” said Mrs. Wright. “The lace on it was real fine old lace ; but it all fell to pieces as you handled it.”

“I am exceedingly glad,” said Mr. Royle, “to hear this mystery explained so far. But, Mr. Askham, can you tell us why she came to this Common ?”

“Yes. She said in one of her memorandums that her boy had been so enchanted with the Common that he always begged her to return here, he having taken a fancy to it as they passed through here one bright summer’s day ; and she

cherished the fancy that her child's spirit lingered here."

"Poor dear!" said Mrs. Wright. "I often used to pity her, though I didn't know why."

"Many people pitied her," said the woman of the post-office. "I did. She was so lonely like! She never had a soul go near her; and never had a letter the whole living time she was here! for I came here the same time she did—a little afore."

"You knew her before she came herè, did you not, Mr. Dale?" asked Mr. Royle.

"She was here before I came," he answered, "and being called by a name I did not know, it never entered my head that I could know her. But in our inquiries, after the lapse of years, I found that I had known her when I was a boy, and she was a grown-up young lady. Our families lived near each other, and were intimate; but I could not trace the slightest resemblance to any one I had ever seen before. And whilst she was alive I had not the smallest idea of it. She knew who I was, and feared I might recognise

her, and thus she would lose her secret ; but she was reassured by my ignorance."

"What was the history of that white rose tree? I really was very sorry I broke it," said Mr. Royle.

"White roses," said Mr. Askham, "were the emblems of the house of York in the civil wars in which her ancestors had fought. They were strict Royalists and Yorkists."

"It is altogether quite a romance," said Miss Cavendish.

"But Colonel Llewellyn," inquired Mr. Royle, "what relation was he to her, that he took such a prominent part here with regard to her?"

"He was a very, very distant relation ; for one of his family, a lady, married one of her ancestors in the reign of Queen Elizabeth ; but they neither of them knew that at the time they met, in their youth. They were very deeply attached to each other, and no doubt would have been married, but for the malice of a lady who slandered each to the other, and separated them."

"Oh-h-h !" was heard through the room.

"Perhaps," said Mr. Royle, "she may have

recognised the wonderful likeness there is between you, Mr. Askham, and Colonel Llewellyn, which is the most extraordinary I ever saw."

"She did. And she could not account for it; for she did not know that I am nearly related to him. Mrs. Askham is also his cousin; her grandmother and my mother were Llewellyns; our common ancestor was brother to the lady (before mentioned) who in the reign of Queen Elizabeth married Sir William Thurlestane of Becklea, the Lady Ann's ancestor. It was a very singular thing that she should have made me her heir, for I suppose I am, after Colonel Llewellyn and his brother, her nearest connection on her father's side. She did not, however, know that; and it was only through my daughter Lucy's admiring a picture at Mr. Llewellyn's house, Cwm Castle, that we found out the connection. But my likeness to Colonel Llewellyn was the reason of her making me her heir; and her old recollection of Mr. Dale, I presume, the reason of her making him one of her trustees."

"How could you find out all these particulars?" asked Mr. Royle.

“By dint of persevering inquiries, and the help of her lawyer, who, fortunately, was still alive, and who had been also the man of business for her family.”

“Was that at York?” asked Mr. Royle.

“Yes; Mr. Trueman of York, who lately died at the age of ninety. I was sorry he did not live to hear of the opening of these buildings, for he took the greatest interest in them.”

“Trueman?” said Mr. Royle; “why it was he who had the grandest funeral that has been seen in York for many a day.”

“Yes. He was universally liked and respected.”

“Did he know of her being here as ‘Mother Pendle’?” asked Mr. Royle.

“No. She so feared her incognito might be incautiously spoken of and broken, that she did not tell him—and he never heard of her death.”

“How did you know he was her lawyer?” asked Mr. Royle.

“By dint of researches which have spread over many years, in which Mr. Dale has kindly always been associated with me; for notwithstanding in

the Will which I first found she made me her heir, I still expected to find others to share her property, for she said she made me her heir to all she possessed 'subject to certain conditions.' For this reason I determined to secure his aid in searching out these conditions. The fruits of our researches are these buildings, for which Mr. Dale and I are the trustees under the second Will that we found. She had seen how Mr. Dale took sick people to his house and succoured them ; and no doubt had observed that a school for girls older than those at the dames' schools was requisite, and thus she provided for both cases, and I am sure her memory will be blessed in the good that both will effect."

"Pray," asked Mr. Royle, "do these institutions refer only to the people of Woodnaston?"

"There was no limitation in the Will, therefore as yet Mr. Dale and I have made none."

"We must see how they work first," said Mr. Dale.

"And now, my friends, I think I have given you a sufficient account for the present of the lady foundress of these buildings. Perhaps on

a future occasion it may interest you to hear somewhat more of her history."

"We should, sir," cried many voices.

"And," said Mr. Dale, "you may like to hear some of it from the lips of a lady who in her youth knew the Lady Ann Thurstane. The whole will then appear more real to you."

"We should, sir," was again re-echoed through the room.

"One of my sisters," he continued, "is coming to visit me, and she will tell you what she remembers of her and her family. It is a sad, romantic tale."

Mr. Askham walked away from the table, and all rose, drawing together in groups and talking, till a general murmur of voices was heard.

Boys will be boys all over the world, and on all occasions! Those of Woodnaston were no exceptions to the rule on this day. Some boys were pulling from the rose-trees and shrubs small sprays to put in their button-holes or to give to the girls, who were near, and were no better than the boys, pointing out the pieces to be gathered for them by the boys; and but for

the timely interposition of Mr. Dale, the gardens would soon have been denuded of flowers.

“Never do this again,” he said ; and they all scampered off, some dropping their bits of flowers as they went.

CHAPTER XV.

THE DEATH OF COLONEL LLEWELLYN.

A FEW days after the opening of the "Thurlestone Buildings" there was great sorrow at the Hall. A letter came announcing the sudden death of Colonel Llewellyn. He was found dead in his bed the day the opening of the Buildings was to take place.

He had not been well for some time ; he had had frequent fainting fits, and had been persuaded, though reluctantly, to give up the idea of going to Woodnaston for the time being. He had written to say so ; but the letter did not reach Mr. Askham till after the opening, and the next news received from Cwm was the sad intelligence of his death.

Mr. Askham was much pressed to attend the funeral, for Mr. Llewellyn said his next heir was to be there. He did not know him, and did not

like what he heard of him, and begged Mr. Askham to come to him if he possibly could.

He therefore decided to set off on his journey to Wales the next day. It was a four or five days' journey, but owing to the good state of the roads—there were many cross roads on the way—he accomplished the journey within the usual time. He found Mr. Llewellyn sadly low in spirits and in health.

“Ivor is gone before me!” was his greeting to Mr. Askham.

The love between the brothers had been very great. Mr. Llewellyn leant upon the Colonel as one of a superior nature; one who had seen the world, and mixed more with society than he had, who had never been out of England; one who had agreeable manners and fluent speech, who enlivened the house and made everybody glad that came near him. The shock of his death was greatly felt by Mr. Llewellyn, but he was not incapacitated by it. He made all the arrangements for the funeral, insisted upon knowing all that was going on, ordered everything, wrote the necessary letters, and would not

allow the dear deceased to be neglected in any way.

When, on the morning he was found dead, the servant came to tell him the Colonel's door was locked, and they could not make him hear, Mr. Llewellyn had at once got up, and would let no one attempt to force the door till he was there; and when he saw the pale face, with a calm, peaceful expression, lying as if asleep, he went up to the bed and spoke, and touched the pale hand that lay outside the bed-clothes, and the face, both cold and unimpressible as marble. Then, when he was aware that death had claimed him, that the pure spirit of him who had led a good life had fled, he sat down by the bedside and burst into tears; the two men, his own valet and the Colonel's, stood like mutes at the foot of the bed.

After a few minutes the Colonel's servant had asked if he should go for the doctor. This roused Mr. Llewellyn, who assented, and told him to go as quickly as possible. Then he left the room, desiring that no one should enter it; the lock was forced out, so it could not be

fastened, but the master's commands were better than a lock.

The doctor came and gave his explanation of the cause of death. He said the case was so plain that no further inquiry need be made.

Mr. Llewellyn wandered about the house like one lost, until his valet's inquiry about letters reminded him that it was necessary to write a great many, which he resolved no one should do but himself. Then the orders to be given for the next melancholy event, the funeral, kept him occupied till Mr. Askham arrived.

He grew more calm when he had him for a companion. His never-failing topic was his brother; he spoke of him as if he were still alive, but absent. Colonel Lewis came over to inquire after him, and he was pleased to see him. Colonel Lewis was a general favourite; his genial and sympathizing spirit made him so.

Mr. Llewellyn was popular in a different way. He had lived on the estate all his life, and knew everybody in the neighbourhood and counties round, and was looked up to on all occasions when sound judgment was required. But he

inclined to be silent, spoke in a low tone of voice, was sparing of his words, though always courteous in the old-fashioned way of great politeness, but was wanting in the open-hearted spirit of his brother, without whom the whole place seemed a desert—his absence made a blank that could not be filled. The house with the shutters nearly closed looked sad enough, and the inmates glided noiselessly about as if fearing to wake the dead.

Mr. Llewellyn went to take a last fond look at his beloved brother in his coffin, and then visited the room no more. On the day of the funeral he was calm and solemn, but quite himself; and he went through the whole ceremony with self-possession and dignified grief—a convulsive sob when the coffin was lowered into the vault in the church was all that was heard.

On the return to the castle the family lawyer read the Will. Everything was left to Mr. Llewellyn for his life; at his death, an endowment of £3000 each was left to the hospital and school at Woodnaston, the Thurlestane Build-

ings; a handsome legacy to Lucy, and the remainder to Mr. and Mrs. Askham.

The heir, Captain Owen Llewellyn, was a young man of good person and manners; he had never before been to Cwm. His father had been so objectionable to both brothers, but to Mr. Llewellyn in particular, that all intercourse had ceased for many years. His habit of constantly bringing actions against Mr. Llewellyn for some trifle about the estate, got to be so despicable that at last none but the lowest order of attorneys would undertake the work. He had been dead now for some years, and his son stood in his stead as heir at law.

Mr. Llewellyn was greatly pleased, after all he had been told to the contrary, to find the young man a gentlemanly and agreeable companion; the reverse of his father in every respect. He invited him to remain a few days with him, and in that time he and Mr. Askham took him all over the estate which would eventually be his. Mr. Llewellyn took a great fancy to him, and invited him to come again, when he should be

better able to introduce him to the county families.

Captain Owen Llewellyn was much gratified by being invited to the funeral, and by the kindness with which he had been received, and the invitation to prolong his visit to Cwm. He expressed himself in grateful terms to Mr. Llewellyn, and they parted the best of friends. He was to return to Cwm when he had leave from his regiment; and finally Mr. Llewellyn looked forward to his visits with a pleasure that he said he could scarcely have believed it possible he could have felt for the son of such a father.

Mr. Askham remained at Cwm about a fortnight, and left Mr. Llewellyn to the neighbourly care of Colonel and Mrs. Lewis, who promised to go over continually to see him.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE BIDDEN GUESTS.

SOME months had elapsed, and Mr. Askham, whose health, without any predominating ailment, had so long given his family much anxiety, began visibly to fail. At length this illness assumed a serious character, and a physician had been called in. He was an old friend of the family, having been always called to their aid when serious sickness required it; so that when he arrived he was prepared to find an alteration he had long foreseen in Mr. Askham's appearance; but he was shocked to see even his presentiments fall short of the actual state. The Squire's state of occasional depression was painfully increased. There was no apparent disease, but a want of vitality, and a sadness for which there was no visible reason.

The Doctor talked to him and succeeded in

rousing him even to smile and occasionally joke. They dined together, and Mrs. Askham and Lucy said they had not seen him so well for a very long time.

It was but a transitory amendment; for in the course of a short time Mr. Askham became seriously ill, and the kind Doctor's visits were frequent.

Thus Mr. Askham was for some weeks confined to his room, which in that fine old mansion was a very spacious apartment, cheerful and warm. It opened into another large room which had been arranged expressly for his wife, and was as pretty as it was convenient and comfortable. This room he had occupied as his sitting-room since his illness, and it became his favourite apartment, even superseding the library.

One Tuesday evening, as he and his wife and Lucy sat there, and he was considerably better in health, he suddenly told them to sit down and write at once, and invite all their neighbours, rich and poor, to come to him the following Thursday, as nearly to twelve o'clock as they

could. He felt himself so much better that he would lose no time, but see them at once. A little while and he might not be able to see them ; for he felt that his convalescence might be short. Therefore he hoped they would be good enough to come at once, and all together. The grooms must go off early in the morning with notes to those at a little distance ; but messages might be sent to those near, without any written invitation.

Lucy and her mother were not a little astonished at this sudden determination.

“ ALL our neighbours, George ? ” said Mrs. Askham.

“ I do not mean the boys and girls, but all the heads of families ; especially the old, and those of my standing in age, both rich and poor, but *especially* the poor, and Mary Stokes—I cannot help calling her by that name.”

“ But, papa,” said Lucy, “ where shall we put them all ? ”

“ This room or the corridor will be quite large enough ; or if I feel well enough I will go down to the large dining-room. A very short note,

saying I have somewhat to say to them, will be sufficient."

Lucy went off to her own sitting-room to write the notes, and Mrs. Askham sent for the housekeeper, desiring she would prepare a repast for their expected guests. The household was one of those old-fashioned, well-appointed establishments, accustomed to the sudden arrival of guests. That this was so, the ample supplies gave evidence of a constant state of preparation for such arrivals; unbounded hospitality being the custom of the house—the case generally in the distant counties.

So the invitations were sent out verbally, or by note, to all the tenants and neighbours, who were all more or less surprised on receiving them, but as ready to respond to the wishes of one so much beloved and respected as their master and friend. Even those who cavilled at his actions, and were accustomed to say bitter things of "the Squire"—for there will be such in all communities—put aside their ill-humours and determined to be at the Hall in good time, according to the request that they would all be there together.

Many were the surmises as to the purport of this assembly.

The general opinion amongst the tenantry was, "The Master, or the Squire, knows he is dying, and he wishes to say good-bye to us." "God bless him!" being the general, almost universal, finish to the sentence. The young of both sexes considered themselves aggrieved at being left out; but principally from a feeling of curiosity.

Farmer Giles gave his usual long-drawn "Ah-h-h!" adding, "A better man never lived."

The gentry thus summoned had various conjectures as to the reason.

Some said, "He is a singular man; full of crotchets of late." Others, "He is too good a fellow to play us a trick." Mr. Dale, to stay his wife's fears, (and perhaps conceal his own—who knows!) jokingly said, "By Jove! we shall have a good luncheon;" adding in the same breath, "He is the best fellow in the world, with or without luncheon."

"Ah, Alan! do not joke about it; I cannot help feeling nervous about this visit."

"What are you afraid of, my love?"

“I am not exactly afraid of anything ; but it seems to me like a general leave-taking ; and it is so sad to lose him. How kind he has been to every one—so considerate.”

“I grant it. But I do not look at the matter in quite so serious a light as you do.”

“What friends we have always been ! It has been quite melancholy to have him, and in fact all of them, kept away from us this long time. And how to——”

“To what ? ” asked her husband, interrupting her ; for he saw the tears come to her eyes.

“To what ? Well I do not quite know. But I suspect——”

“Do not suspect anything, my love. Wait patiently. Why perplex yourself with ideas that may be both erroneous and hurtful to your own peace of mind ? ”

“Oh Alan, you are so philosophical.”

Mr. Dale laughed. “I want you to be less sensational. Askham knows perfectly well what he is about, I am certain ; and does not wish to frighten you or any one else.”

"Then you know what he wants to speak about?"

"Not at all; but I have confidence in his good sense and judgment, and wait to see results."

"Well, I will try to dismiss it from my mind. But I am not like you, Alan."

"My love, I know you are not. If you had been I should never have married you. You are my better half, Emily."

"Nonsense, Alan," she answered laughing.

"I am going up to see Askham, but I shall not be gone long," said Mr. Dale by way of reply; then seeing his two daughters pass the window, he called to them, "Get yourselves ready, and you can ride with me when I come back." Then to his wife, "We shall be back to luncheon."

At that moment up rode Mr. Royle, who after the usual greetings said:

"Of course you have had an invitation to the Hall to-morrow. Is there any answer expected? I have got ours in my pocket to leave at the Lodge." Then, without waiting for an answer,

he continued: "What strange freak is this? I hear that all the neighbourhood, rich and poor, are to be there. Are you going, Miss Elizabeth?"

"No," she said with a smile, "*we* are not invited."

"What's the meaning of it, Dale?"

"I cannot presume to say."

"I am more sure than ever, Dale, that his head is affected. Remember how he suffered from his head after that fall with the tree."

"It is not surprising. The only wonder is that he was not killed. But I must wish you good-bye. I have much to do to-day. If you will go in, my wife will be very glad to see you."

So he entered the house, and Mr. Dale went to the Hall.

On his return he found Mr. Royle still there, but preparing to resume his ride.

"Tiresome man!" said Mrs. Dale, when he was gone; "why did you send him to me, Alan? He has wasted all my morning."

"I thought, my love, you liked to see him?"

“I do not dislike him, I believe, so much as other people do ; but his visits are wearying ; and he always seems to think there is something hidden from him. He is so tiresome with his questions—‘ Who is this ? ’—and ‘ What is that ? ’—and ‘ Have you heard so and so ? ’—till one is tired of saying one does not know or cannot say. How can one answer all his tittle-tattle ? ”

“ Were you very curt to him, then ? ”

“ No ; but he tried to get me to give a reason for this meeting to-morrow : and of course I could not, nor would I if I had known, just to satisfy his curiosity,” she said. “ I believe it is for this inquisitiveness that he is so little liked.”

“ Elizabeth ! Jane ! ” called Mr. Dale to his daughters. “ Come, I cannot wait ; good-bye,” he said to his wife, “ and be merry when I come back.”

In a short time the Misses Cavendish drove up to the Rectory. Mrs. Dale received them joyfully.

“ How glad I am to see you,” she said. “ You have been away so long.”

“ We only returned on Monday, and Char-

lotte and Amelia are still away," said Miss Cavendish.

Then after some little conversation, Miss Cavendish said :

" We are rather alarmed. We got this invitation from the Hall, this morning early ; and we do not know what to think of it. We heard Mr. Askham had been ill during our absence. But do tell me ; is he worse ?—or is he apprehensive of a fatal issue to his illness, that he so earnestly wishes us to go to him, on such short notice ? "

" He has been very seriously ill, but is much recovered. His old friend and physician has been constantly to see him until last week."

" Will he be there to-morrow, do you think ? "

" I cannot at all tell. He has so great a distance to come, that I should imagine there will not be time."

" What did he think of Mr. Askham's illness ? "

" He said to Alan, that it appeared to him it was more mental than bodily suffering—that it appeared as if there was something that preyed upon his mind. But he also thought seriously

of the pain he suffers from his shoulder and hand."

"Poor man! But what mental cares can he have that he should keep secret? His family are all he could wish, and he has every worldly comfort and advantage."

"As you may remember, he has never been the merry, light-hearted creature he was, since that accident, and at the time suffered greatly from his head as well as from the bruises. Alan and I have been distressed beyond description to see the absent, care-worn expression he assumes when his arm is painful."

"I hear the whole neighbourhood are invited—rich and poor."

"Yes; but none of the young people, or it would be quite a crowd."

"It is a singular fancy in its present aspect; though I should be sorry to allow that anything but good sense would proceed from him."

"It makes me sad to think of it, but Alan says it is unwise to anticipate evil, and we must wait for results."

"I should be glad to take his advice. But

we were so startled by Lucy's note, that we could not help coming here to inquire about it ; we shall meet, then, to-morrow, at the Hall? ”

“ Yes ; and I am sure I shall be in a state of fever the whole time ; for Mrs. Askham and Lucy, as well as for myself.”

CHAPTER XVII.

IS IT SERIOUS?

MRS. ASKHAM was in a very nervous state, not being able at all to guess what this calling together of high and low was to lead to. No inquiries of her husband could draw from him any explanation ; but it appeared to her as if he were going to do that which was very painful to him, and for which he was endeavouring to strengthen himself.

Such was the effect upon her that she did not like even to speak to Lucy about it. She dreaded she knew not what. It was so contrary to her husband's usual confiding disposition ! He had always before told her what was on his mind. His fits of absence had occurred so frequently, and over so long a period, that they had no place in her thoughts.

When Mr. Dale went to see him, after getting

his message and invitation, Mr. Askham said to him :

“Are you sure we have left out none of those persons about our own standing in age, who were in the neighbourhood at the time of the falling of the tree, when I was hurt ?”

“I did not mention Mary Bowes and her husband.”

“Ah, they should be here, and that comical fellow from Yorkshire whom I have heard of, who married her sister.”

“I do not know if he is with them. He does not live there.”

“I should like them all to be here if possible; and that young soldier, Wads.”

“I will ride over and ask them to come, if you like. Wads is a quarryman with Ferner, now.”

“And I should be glad if you would bring back with you, for me, that knobbed club that belonged to Will Stokes — poor misguided fellow,” and he sighed. “Mary will let you have it *for me*; although she keeps it so strictly in her sight, as the witness against his murderer.”

He shuddered as he spoke the words. "I should not like to send a servant for it, nor to ask any one else but you to get it for me."

"I will do anything you like; can you think of any one else?"

"No. But should you remember any one, I shall be obliged to you to ask them to come. In my state of health I cannot give long notice, and I am so anxious to have this meeting over," he said, with his old absent look and melancholy tone of voice.

Mr. Dale was as much puzzled as any one else about this sudden action on Mr. Askham's part. A wish, it seemed to be, on the carrying out of which his whole future happiness depended. He was not naturally a hasty or enthusiastic man; yet this sudden thought had taken possession of him, and he insisted on its immediate realization. It must be carried out to its full extent. He would have all those invited, assembled in the long corridor leading from his dressing-room should he not be well enough to go down-stairs. It was wide, and could be well provided with sofas and chairs if

necessary. But see them HE MUST, under any circumstances, he said.

“I begin to think,” remarked Mr. Dale to his wife, “there must be a shadow of truth in the idea that Royle always has had, that Askham’s head was affected by the blow from the falling tree.”

“Oh, Alan! never mind what Mr. Royle says; he is always trying to pick holes in people. To believe him one would have to think his red-haired pate was the only reliable one! You know how disagreeable he can be.”

“Whatever may be his faults, he is a very shrewd man.”

“He may be wrong for all that.”

“Oh ye women! How intolerant you are! alike for good and evil!”

“Don’t say that, Alan! But what people are so frightened at in this curious wish—for it is really a curious wish — of Mr. Askham’s I cannot imagine. I met Sally Giles, and she was all in a twitter about it. ‘Surely they had always paid their rent,’ she said, and added that her

husband had done nothing but groan since they had been summoned to attend at the Hall; and she declared, if it was not soon over they would both be 'down with the colic,' for it made her sick and sore at heart to see him go on so."

"Poor old Sally!" said Mr. Dale, laughing.

"I told her," his wife continued laughing, "to bring him here, and I would give them each a glass of cherry-brandy to cheer them up before they went there.—But there really is nothing to laugh at, Alan. What does Mrs. Askham say about it?"

"She says nothing at all; she does not even look grave, though a shade of anxiety is seen in her face; as you know she never questions a wish of his."

"But she owned she was startled at the first announcement of his intention."

"No wonder, and so was Lucy. It was nine o'clock in the evening when he suddenly told them his decision, and begged they would write notes at once, to send off early in the morning."

"I hear that some of the young people are vexed that they are not invited."

“That is nonsense ; girls and boys are always in the way when anything serious is in hand.”

“Is there anything serious, Alan ?”

“I do not know ; but Askham’s manner is serious enough about it.”

“And why should the poor as well as the rich be invited ?”

“My dear, I cannot tell.”

“Do you think he imagines himself so ill that he is near his death, and he wishes to take leave of us ?”

“I cannot tell. But it seems to me, my love, that the habit of asking questions innumerable must have been inherited by Jeff from his mother !”

“Ah !” she said laughing. “How we used to lecture poor Jeff for what we considered his great fault ; and has it not turned out to be his most useful talent !”

“He has made a good use of it certainly.”

“I wish he were here !” the mother said with a sigh.

“He is better occupied where he is.”

CHAPTER XVIII.

WHAT WAS THOUGHT ABOUT THE INVITATIONS TO
THE MEETING.

MR. DALE and his daughters rode to Ashencroft Gate. It was dinner-time. John Ferner came out to hold Mr. Dale's horse whilst he went in to see Mary. He told her of Mr. Askham's wish to see her and her husband at the Hall the next day—that he had something to tell them—and asked her to lend Mr. Askham the holly club, which he would take back with him. She rather reluctantly lent the stick, even though it was for her master.

“You'll be sure to let I have it back, sir,” she said.

“You can have it again to-morrow when you return home.”

“Sir, I couldn't leave sight of that cloob to

no one, save the master. I keep it as a witness agin they bad fellers. We'll be sure to find 'em some day, sir. 'Murder allays comes up,' they say. Do you know what the Squire wants it for, sir?" she said.

"He did not tell me. But it will be safe with him. He will be sure to let you have it again."

"Thank you kindly, sir."

"Now, John and Mary, mind you are both at the Hall to-morrow by noon or a little before. And bring David Wads with you."

"Yes, sir, surely," they answered, and Mr. Dale, taking the stick with him, rode off with his daughters.

"What an odd-shaped stick," the girls remarked. "Papa, do show it to us."

"What can that peaked piece be for?" said Jane.

"It would give a very nasty wound," Mr. Dale answered. "Now, Jane, do not try it on poor old Jack."

"Oh no, papa. Please take it back; it is heavy too."

Said John Ferner to his wife in the evening—he took a long time to consider everything—
“What’s the meaning of this, Mearie?”

“What, John?”

“Why, this that ta’ Parson said?”

“What’s that, John?”

“Why, lors, Mearie, didn’t ye hear ’un?”

“Hear what, John?”

“Why, as we’s to go to the Hall to-morrow, for the Squire wants to see us.”

“Yes, the master’s got somethin’ to say to us.”

“Well, Mearie, what’s that?”

“Lors, John, how foolish you talk. How do I know? They gentlefolks has so many diff’rant ways, there’s no knowing what. But he’s a good master as ever was, and it’s only good as he wants, I know.”

“He wanted that cloob o’ yourn.”

“He can have it; he’ll give it back to ’un to-morrow, Mr. Dale says.”

“What can he want he for?”

“It’s safe wi’ him; they fellers won’t come before to-morrow’s over, be sure, John. And I

shall have it back ready to settle 'em when they comes this way."

"Why lors, Mearie, what are ye going to do with 'em? Strike 'em with it?"

"Strike 'em? No, John, there's no need for that; they'd be so frightened at the sight of he, knowing all they did wi' he, they'll stand staring."

"And what 'ud you do?"

"Why, I should call thee, John, to come and take 'em up as murdered my puir Will, as never did no harm to nobody."

"Heck, Mearie! but they wouldn't stand quiet for that and for thee."

"Aye, but they should, John, for ye'd make 'em."

"Lors, Mearie, lass, how thee do talk!"

"The Squire's feeling himself done for in this world, Giles," said the farmer's wife to her husband after they had had their summons to the Hall.

"Ah-h-h-h," groaned Farmer Giles.

"Ye think so then, Giles?"

"I don't know what to think, Sally," he said sadly.

"Ye think that the Squire is fast going to die after his illness, that he wants to see us, eh?"

"I hope not, Sally."

"Well, he's not an old man. He's not so old as we by these ten year, though he be a grandfather."

"People don't wait to be old to die, Sally."

"Nay, but he was old-like when he was young; he couldn't do nothing for he self after that accident when he was hurted."

"Ah-h-h-h," groaned the farmer.

"Don't groan so, Giles. It's enough to giv'un the black Devils to hear 'un. Ye canna bear to hear the Squire's name, but ye begin to grunt and to groan. What are ye so unhappy about, husband, that makes ye do so?"

"Ah-h! Nothing, Sally!" he said with a sigh. "Nothing!"

"Nothing? but it's something," and she muttered to herself; "and I'll know what it is afore long, hubby!"

Mr. Dale and his daughters rode on to

Sleamoor to Mary Bowes and her husband. When they got there they found Eam Greenwood standing at the cottage-door.

“Welcome, sir,” he said; “and I hope I see you and the ladies is well. Susan,” he cried to his wife, “here’s ta’ Parson, Measter Dale, frae Woodnaston. Make your riv’rence to ’un,” and he took her by the arm. “He be my best friend as ever was. He tooked me, and he nussed me, and he fed me, and he bound up my head, and did everything good Sammy did in the Boible, that our Parson talks about; so, Susie, make thy riv’rence to ’un, lass, and Mearie. Jim!” he shouted. “Susie, go and fetch ’em, there’s a good lass.”

The girls were highly amused at this quaint Yorkshireman, his action, his broad accent, and his good-heartedness.

“Eam,” said Mr. Dale, “we want you to come to Woodnaston. Squire Askham wants you to come, and bring your wife with you, to-morrow, to his house.”

“Wants I, sir? Why I never seed he in my loife. Wants Susie! Lass,” he said in a lower

voice, taking her by the arm, "does ye know 'un? Ye never told me, lass."

"Nay, Eam, I don't know 'un. It's mighty kind of the Squire to ask 'un, Eam."

"Aye, mighty foine," with a shake of the head; "why, sir, I've never been to Woodnaston since that time as I was a lad and took ill here, and I never seed the Squire. What can he want 'un for, sir?"

"He wishes to see you," said Mr. Dale.

"Your servant, sir; your servant, ladies," said Jim and Mary Bowes, coming up. "What's that you say, sir?" said Mary. "The Squire?—that's Squire Askham, I s'pose. The Squire wants to see Eam and Susan?"

"Yes, Mary; and you and Jim too, at the Hall, to-morrow. He has asked all neighbours rich and poor to come to him, and he wants you all to come also. He says he has something to say to you all."

"It's mighty little he can have to say to I," said Eam Greenwood. "I never seed he, and he never seed oi', sir. He's a 'quintance of Susie's I do believe."

"Nay, Eam. I never seed he,"

“Then what do he want we for, sir?”

“He did not tell me; he only begged me to ride over here and ask you all to be at the Hall to-morrow by noon, or a little before. Will you come?”

“Aye, sir, that we will,” answered Jim Bowes; “he’s a good gentleman I hear all the country round, say—and why shouldn’t we go, Mearie, to ’un, when he axes ’un?”

“Sure, sir, we will, and thank you kindly,” added Mary Bowes.

“We’ll set out by the early morn, sir, to be right,” said Jim. “Eam, you’ll do the same.”

“Well, sir, to please the gentleman and you too, sir, Mr. Dale, I will. Though what he wants wi’ I—and Susie too! Why, Susie, ye never been to a Hall afore, have ye, lass? Yes, sir, we’ll go to please ’un.”

“That’s right.” Then turning to Susan, Mr. Dale said, “I thought your name was Nancy.”

“Yes, sir,” she replied.

“Her name, sir, be Anna Susannah,” said Mary.

“Our two coos at whoam be Bet and Nancy, so we maun call her Susie when she cum to we,” said Eam. “Coos and cristuns be bound to be called different. She’s that familiar, if I called ‘Nancy,’ I’d never be free of the coo, sir.”

“So we all took to it, sir,” said Mary.

“That’s right. Remember, at noon tomorrow,” said Mr. Dale.

“I’ll see to it, sir,” replied Jim.

Mr. Dale and his daughters rode quickly away. As soon as they were gone, Eam said to Susan :

“Well, Susie, lass, here’s a pretty go!—what shall ye do at the Hall, lass, eh? Ye shouldn’t bring your head down, and look shamefaced, and ye maunna look up too free. Ye can look at Mearie, and do as she do, lass. And I will look for myself. Why, what can ’un want we for?”

“The Squire’s got some notion,” said Mary.
“It’s sure to be for good.”

“There isn’t a gentleman round the country bears so high as he do,” said Jim.

“And it’s a real fine place he lives in, they

say," added Mary. "Why, ye know, Eam, ye ha' been, long days ago, at that place."

"It's a place I wish I'd never gone to," returned Eam. "Why, they wanted to put me i' the prison. Wasn't faither and muther put about when I tell 'un? Faither swore they was a set of wagabones, and muther she greet sore; so did Abie. And Tum and Jooas swore they'd fight 'un. No, I don't care for Woodenstow—but I maun go with Susie to-morrow."

"Well, it was hard upon ye, Eam, to say ye'd kilt the man."

"I didn't care about that, Mearie, for I didn't do it, and couldn't make me say I did. But it wur hard to be threatened wi' the prison—awful bad—and be so knocked."

"Aye, and be so knocked about, Eam," said Susan.

"Well, I wor knocked about; lors, how my head did ache! What can they want wi' us?"

"We'll know to-morrow," said Jim.

Groups of people assembled in the village of

Woodnaston talking over the summons to the Hall. The women spoke of it in hushed voices, as something they were terrified at.

"Is it anything more about 'Mother Pendle?'" asked one.

"The poor Squire has been long ailing," remarked another.

"And he don't like parting with Miss Lucy," said a third.

"My lady has looked sad enough often of late, when she used to be so smiling, sitting beside him in the carriage," observed another.

"He's got cold, may be, and worn to death with those buildings—and he's got low like, and so thinks too much about it," was yet again another comment.

"We'll go though, won't we?" said one of the men; "he's a good gentleman, and never means ought but good to no one."

"Aye, we'll go, if it's only to please him and the ladies."

At the Hall we may be sure the whole business was discussed from first to last.

Mrs. Cubberd, the housekeeper, sighed and sighed :

“ It’s not for the hard work that this sudden thought of the Master’s gives, and the deal Missis and I have to think about to get it all ready—a dinner in the audit room and a cold collection in the library, and all the tables and everything moved out of the great dining-room, and all the sofas and chairs carried in! We shall get through that, Mary House,” she remarked to one of the housemaids. “ But it’s poor Master. So ill too! Like to die the other day, I’m sure, though Missis wouldn’t allow it; that’s the terrible thing—— And all my jellies a’ spoiling, I do believe,” she cried. “ Betsy, what are you a thinking of? Leave off that nonsense. For shame, John Varlet, and go about your business. Can’t you take a plate without knocking them all about? Ah! (a scream) I said so! Why, you’ve near lost me a whole quart of jelly!—rattling the frame in that way. Suppose it had gone over, where should I be?—and all to make over again.”

“ No harm done, mum; it’s only shook a bit.”

“Shook a bit?—get about your own business, you lazy fellow.”

Exit John laughing, and Betsy ditto, with her back turned, in the scullery.

Yet, they were all extremely puzzled to think what was going to happen.

As he walked to the Hall on the Thursday morning, Farmer Giles said to his wife:

“Missis, I don’t care why, but I doant like this visit; I’m quite moidered about it.”

“Hecht! What nonsense, Giles,” she replied; “why, sure the Squire means nought but good aboon it. We’ve always paid our rent, and been friends. And if the bairns have at times been noisy when childer, they never do no worse.”

“Ah-h-h-h!” said he, shaking his head, and they trudged on together. “It’s not that, Sally.”

“What be it then?”

“Ah-h-h——”

“Ye make me shiver all over, Giles, wi’ yer grunts and groans.”

CHAPTER XIX.

THE MEETING.

MR. ASKHAM had slept well, and felt much better than usual on the morning of the meeting. He decided to receive his guests in the large dining-room.

By mid-day all the guests had arrived. The Squire took his place in his great arm-chair, with his wife and Lucy on either side. Mr. and Mrs. Dale, Mr. and Mrs. Royle, the Misses Cavenish, Mr. Vyal and his wife, and other neighbours, were placed on each side, and the tenants and others along the end of the room. Farmer Giles and his wife, John and Mary Ferner, Mary Bowes and her husband, Eam Greenwood and Susan, Wright and his wife from the Inn, and Wads, sat in the front row ; and the rest behind them, including some of the servants at the Hall and the Rectory. The room was full but not

crowded, and when they were all seated, Mr. Askham addressed them as follows :

“My friends, I have invited you here on very short notice, for my health has been so failing and uncertain of late (Farmer Giles groaned), so precarious indeed, I could no longer wait to call you together, and I am pleased you have so willingly answered to my invitation.”

“We’d do anything for ye, master,” said Mary Ferner, getting up and curtseying, and sobbing—her tears, poor woman, were ever at hand.

“Aye, sir,” said the others, “and we be sorry to hear you be bad.”

“You have come,” continued Mr. Askham, “to hear me tell a long story—a story that perhaps a few of you may almost have forgotten, though you were as much alive to it at the time it refers to as I was.

(Groans from Farmer Giles.)

“Yes, sir,” said Mary Ferner, who continued standing.

“You will remember a summer’s day, one Monday, the 7th of June, many years ago.”

"That's the day my puir Will died," screamed Mary Ferner.

"Well," continued Mr. Askham, "that Monday, the 7th of June, a man was found dead in the Fell Meadow."

"He wur my puir Will!" she sobbed.

"I'se mind that too, sir," said Eam Greenwood, rising; "why, lors, sir, they near a killed me too. I'se mind it, no fear," and he sat down again.

"Well, you remember that day, and that you were taken up on suspicion, Greenwood."

"Aye, sir, I'se never forget it to my dying day."

"Did any one believe you had done the deed you were accused of?"

"I didn't me self, sir; lors, how could 'un?"

"You might as well a said a babby done it, sir," said Bowes, "though I beant there to see 'un."

Farmer Giles groaned.

"You remember all that passed better than I can tell you, I dare say. That same day I was knocked down by the falling of a tree. You all

wondered how that could be, for the woodmen called to me to get out of the way. I was so lost in thought, and suffering so much pain, though no one knew it but myself, at the time, that I did not heed them. I was wondering why I should have this terrible pain inflicted on me. I could not account for the cause of it—or rather I should say, I could not account for the reason of its infliction. And the tree was upon me before I heeded the warnings of the woodmen.”

(Groans from Farmer Giles, who kept rocking himself backwards and forwards; his wife jogging his elbow as a hint to be quiet.)

“I was taken home almost in a state of insensibility—at any rate so that I could scarcely understand what was said. As I lay on the grass I heard people say something about a man being killed, or dead. I thought at first they meant me. When Mr. Vyal examined me he could not account, he said, for the worst injury—that on my left shoulder. I was so stupefied that I could say nothing.”

“No, sir, begging your pardon for interrupt-

ing you," said Mr. Vyal, "nor can I at this moment. It constantly recurs to my mind."

"I have felt that injury ever since. At this moment I feel it, and at times so much that I cannot use my hand or arm; so I have no cause to forget that day. The members of my own family and household, as well as Mr Dale and the Doctor, will remember how difficult it was to keep me from attending the inquest, even ill as I was; but they succeeded; to my sorrow ever since. Who will believe me when I declare that I, AND I ALONE, WAS THE CAUSE OF WILL STOKES'S DEATH?" This was said emphatically.

A general scream came from the women, followed by murmurs from the men. Farmer Giles groaned audibly; his wife crying and catching hold of him.

"Don't say so, master," screamed Mary Ferner. "A kinder, gooder master never was. Don't say so, master; it was they bad fellers did it."

"No, Mary—I DID IT," he said, in an impressive tone of voice. "I did it—I did not know

at the time that I had caused his death ; but I knew that I had knocked him down."

"How did it happen, sir," said Mr. Vyal.

"I had been talking with Farmer Giles, as he will remember."

"Yes, sir," the farmer groaned in reply.

"I left him, to go to the Holt Farm, but I did not find any one there. I returned by the Fells to get into the park, and as I was walking leisurely along I heard a footstep behind me. I did not heed it, but immediately my hat with a heavy blow was knocked over my eyes, and a heavier blow came on my left shoulder. I immediately turned and hit my assailant a blow with my fist. I could not see whom, nor where I struck, except that I knew it must be his head, for my hat covered my eyes. A heavy thud, as that of the fall of a man, followed, and on raising my hat I saw, to my utter surprise and astonishment, WILL STOKES ! lying, as I thought, stunned. I shall never forget the wrathful expression of his face. I said to myself, 'There you may lie till you recover ; you villain !' "

"Oh, sir!" screamed Mary Ferner, "he wasn't a villain."

"He was though," said the men, "to do that."

"I left him," continued Mr. Askham, "and got over the paling into the Park, and walked straight to where they were felling the tree, my head aching and my arm quite benumbed." He took from behind him the knobbed club. "With this stick or club was I struck. My hat alone prevented my being struck dead on the spot, I feel certain."

"Aye, sir, I knowed it, I knowed it," groaned Farmer Giles.

"Did you see him strike the blow, Giles?"

"No, sir; but I see you going along there, and very soon after I see Will Stokes a running stealthy-like, with a stick. A knoll hid the rest from me, and I was late for market, so I didn't see no more. I never guessed what he was after. But I knowed it. I knowed it couldn't be none but yourself, sir, as could tackle Will Stokes. But how it come to pass—who hit first, or how it wur done—I couldn't say. So I never

said a word to no one of my notions. You'll forgive me, sir, speaking so freely."

"Oh, Giles! if you had but been a witness of the scene!"

"I'd never be a witness agin you, sir. I'd a bit my tongue out first."

"No, Giles; but if you knew the horror of having done anything, more especially of so vital a nature, even though not a crime—the horror of having NO WITNESS! It has been my sorrow all these years; and the pain from the blow of that stick with its cruel point, has made that act ever present with me. I killed him! Perhaps you, my friends, may say I murdered him!"

"You did it in self-defence. If it was homicide in any way, it was justifiable homicide. No Court in England could have attributed murder to you; but, on the contrary, it was evidently the object of Stokes to murder, or do you some grievous bodily injury," said Mr. Dale.

"Certainly," echoed Mr. Royle, "it was justifiable homicide."

Mrs. Askham sat as one entranced; so did Lucy.

“Now that I hear what you have said, and again see that villainous stick,” said Mr. Vyal, “I can well account for the injury to the point of your left shoulder and arm.” He then gave a technical description of the injury.

“My wife? Lousa?” said Mr. Askham, seeing her scared look. “Do you then consider me a murderer? It is this effect upon you that I have always dreaded. Say that you also believe I acted only in self-defence!”

Tears came to her relief, and she said faintly, “Oh George! could I do otherwise?”

Mary Ferner’s tears had stopped flowing, and given way to utter astonishment.

“If I could only find out the reason for that attack upon me!—what I had done, that made him my enemy even unto death!” said Mr. Askham.

“Ah, sir!” said Mary Ferner, in tears again, “you said he was a poacher, and a poacher wur no better nor a thief.”

“Did I? And was it for that he wished to take my life?”

“He said, sir, he couldn’t a bear it, sir ; it wur fearful to him to hear it.”

“I have thought and thought over my conduct with regard to him, and thought in vain. No circumstances that I could recall should lead to such an act. Why did you not tell me this when we have spoken of the matter before, Mary ? If you knew, why did you not tell me ?”

“Sir, it never come to me till this minute to remember it.”

“Did any one else hear him utter a threat against me ?”

“I, sir, heard him threaten some one with that stick ; for I saw him cut it in the Ridge Wood, and I got him to shorten the side-point. A more murderous-looking tool I never saw. And I told him so. He said he made it for a purpose, and some one should feel it—but he wouldn’t say who.”

“Mary Ferner, tell me truly,” said Mr. Askham ; “was it only for those words ?—or did I ever do, or threaten, anything that would make him my enemy, or attempt my life ?”

“No, good Master. You was always the

kindest of Masters, and many's the times I said to puir Will he was doing wrong, and might well anger you, sir; but all along you was ever kind to us and to me." She then flung herself on her knees at Mr. Askham's feet, saying, "Oh, forgive him, sir. Forgive me too, that ever such a thing should enter his head, and I shouldn't know of it to tell you again. Forgive me, sir, for the children's sake, who knows nothing about it, nor never shall." And she wept bitterly.

"I have nothing to forgive you, my good woman. You have had nothing to do with it. I have pitied you most sincerely."

"Oh, sir, do say you forgive me."

"Certainly I will, if that can give you comfort. Truly I forgive you, Mary, and all belonging to you."

"Thank you, sir; that means puir Will too. Now I can die happy when my time comes. Thank you, sir. Thank you, sir," and she returned to her seat. But she almost immediately came back again, saying, "But that awful stick, sir. Will you please let me burn

it ? I canna bear the sight of it. Please, sir, do."

"It is well you kept it, Mary. It has been the witness you anticipated, and I have no doubt it will be burnt as you desire, in the presence of all here, should there be no further need for its production."

Mr. Askham looked exhausted ; he leant back in his chair and gasped for breath. Lucy spoke to the butler, who went out and returned with wine and water.

Mr. Askham drank some, and ordered some to be given to Mary Ferner and Farmer Giles.

Eam Greenwood had sat all the time with his mouth partly open in grim astonishment.

"Now, sir," said Mary Bowes to Mr. Dale, "I hope everybody will hold their tongues, and say nothing no more of our puir lad, as was called a murderer, and wur half killed heself when he didn't do it. Jack Downes," she said, turning to him, "ye know Jim and me has never forgiven you for doing of it."

"Aye, missis, it's curious altogether."

"You may depend upon it, Mary," said Mr.

Dale, "no one will say ought about him to his disparagement."

"Aye, sir, ye was always my friend," exclaimed Greenwood.

"I alone," said Mr. Askham, "am the person never to forget it. At every hour of the day I am more or less reminded of that sad morning ; but henceforth I shall feel differently concerning it. I shall no longer puzzle and consume myself with questions and surmises as to the reason for the blow. I now know that the assault upon me arose from misconception of my motive in what I said to him. Mary had told me of Will Stokes's being intimate with those I knew to be poachers ; my advice to him was to have nothing to do with them, and I spoke of them in the strongest terms to deter him from following in the same way, not suspecting him of being a poacher himself."

"I confess, sir," said David Wads, "having been a poacher myself before I enlisted ; but I was but a lad, not sixteen, so my practice has been but small. I and Tom Trapper were with Will Stokes on the 7th of June. It was early

morning, as I said before ; I was with him when he cut that holly club, and Tom Trapper was with him just after he had got rid of some hares at the ' Wheatsheaf,' on the Ulsford Road. Tom and me went together to Ulsford ; we did not see Stokes there at all. We talked over the morning's work ; afterwards I enlisted with one gang and he with another ; and I've never heard of him since. I remember it all as well as if it only happened yesterday. I've so often thought of that stick ; I never saw the like for curious growth. He knew where to find it, and went straight up through the brambles to get it. It would have passed any one else's notice, it was so hidden away."

"The matter is very much cleared up," said Mr. Askham ; " I only regret that death has taken some of those present on the scene at that time. Mr. Lawse, the Coroner, who died only two years ago, and Ned Flinders ; both prominent persons at the inquest. But Mr. Lawse, especially, I should have liked to be present to-day. How many times I have been on the point of making my confession of being the actual cause of

Stokes's death, I can scarcely enumerate; but always some small thing has deterred me. And I must own to the weakness that the dread of causing pain to my dear wife," he said, taking Mrs. Askham's hand as he spoke, "has been the principal. I could not bear the idea that she should think she had a murderer for her husband."

"Oh, George," she cried, interrupting him, "how could I think so? You have ever been the most compassionate of men."

"Aye, my lady," put in Sally Giles, "and so he be. Why, Giles and me, we knowed the Squire, and his father afore him. They be right good gentlemen!"

"Sir," said Giles, "I knowed you done it in defence of your life; I could a swore to it, though I didn't actually see it done. When I came back from market and heard the news, I was as sartin sure what had happened as if I'd seen it. I went to the Hall to inquire, and was quite put about to hear Mrs. Cubberd a mourning over Will Stokes. You'll remember that, ma'am," he said, turning towards the housekeeper.

She nodded. "As I felt sartin he had given a blow at the Squire with that great stick. But I didn't see it near enough to swear to, nor did I see him aim at you, sir; but I seed him a going cat-like towards you, and I'm sure, sir, if you'd been at the inquest, I must a told what I felt sure on. But there was no call for me to blacken your face, as people might a thought I wanted to do. And I would a kep' it a secret till my dying day, if ye had not spoke out like this yourself, sir; and I hope ye'll kindly forgive me."

"Then, Giles," said Sally, "that's what ye've been a groaning and a grunting about all these years, whenever the Squire was named as being sick of his arm?"

"Aye, Sally. It was the only way I had of keeping silence about it."

"Well, ye pretty near told, Giles; leastways to I as knows ye. I knowed ye knowed summut about that tree that hurted the Squire, or summut else as did."

"Never mind, Sally. The Squire will forgive me; won't yer, sir? And forgive ye too for so

far guessing of it. It's well ye kep' yer tongue to yeself, Sally."

"My good friends," said Mr. Askham, "I have nothing to forgive you, but have to thank you for your consideration of me, which I sincerely do. I have now told you my story, and have kept you a long while listening to me. I must add, that late as this confession has been made by me, it could not have been so clearly brought out at any earlier period. The evidence of David Wads, I consider, was most necessary to completing the investigation. I hope I have explained the part I took on that sad 7th of June, and that you acquit me of all malice or intention of evil towards the unhappy man whose life was taken by my hand. I have kept you a long while, and now I beg you will all go into the audit room to dine. Good-day, my friends."

"We do, sir; we do, sir—God bless you, sir; and thank you kindly," was the cry of all as they rose to go out of the room.

Mary Ferner, like a true woman! waited to have the last word, and said:

"Sir, I knowed it could na be that puir sick

lad, as was cotched. And I said so at the crowner's table. It maun be one with the strent' of a man to master my puir Will."

"Yes, my poor woman. Go and get some dinner. Good-day," was all that Mr. Askham could say; he was fairly exhausted.

The butler took them all out as quickly as possible; and the gentry were taken by Mr. Dale and Lucy into the library, where a collation was awaiting them. Mr. Askham was not well enough to join them, and his wife remained with him. So Lucy and Mr. Dale did the honours of the house. She was not in the best of spirits; the meeting had been a great trial to her, and its result surprised her much, as she had never heard the slightest allusion made to the occurrences of which her father and others had spoken. She said to Mr. Dale:

"You will tell me what all this means, will you not? I do not understand it."

"Yes," he said, "another day. Take your place at the head of the table and be merry," and he gently pressed her hand.

However, merry she could not be. Mr. Vyal

saw how she felt the events of the day, and with his usual good-nature kept the attention of the guests alive, and entertained them with stories of some of his personal adventures amongst the hills and moors ; Mr. Dale recording others—and thus a cheerful hour was passed. Finally, Mr. Royle said the day would not be complete without a toast ; and begged them all to drink with him to the health of Mr. and Mrs. Askham. This met with a willing response from all the party ; which soon after broke up.

CHAPTER XX.

EAM'S OFFERING.

THE meeting at the Hall broke up before four o'clock. The drive through the park was quite gay with the numerous vehicles and pedestrians.

As Mr. Dale passed through the gate, he observed Eam Greenwood coming out of the Lodge carrying a large parcel. He made Mr. Dale a profound bow with his leg straight out with a scrape behind him, in the old-fashioned style of people of his class; and his wife made a bob curtsey after her fashion.

"He has brought his pack with him," said Mrs. Dale, as they drove along, having observed the large parcel.

"Perhaps he takes this opportunity, like a shrewd Yorkshireman, to do 'a little stroke of business' in the village as he is here."

"Very likely," she answered, and then con-

tinued, "were you not very much astonished at Mr. Askham's revelation? I was. I never dreamt of his having anything to do with Will Stokes's death."

"Nor had I," said Mr. Dale.

"Only think, too, of Farmer Giles knowing it, and keeping it a secret all these years! For my part I had almost forgotten all about it."

"Giles did not exactly *know* of it, Emily; he only *guessed* it must have happened much as it did. How much torture of mind it would have saved poor Askham, if he had witnessed the act!"

"But then the true generosity of his nature would not have been so plainly seen."

"With regard to Mary Ferner, you mean."

"Yes. Remember what a more than kind friend he has been to her, even anticipating her wants, though he never went to the cottage. She told me many times how she had hoped he would go there when he has been shooting in Ashencroft Spinney, but he never did. She wanted him to see how well she kept her house and poultry-yard, but except when the new

buildings were being made he never went near the place."

"It was painful to him to see her, no doubt; 'a widow by his hand,' as he expresses it."

"But, Alan, it appears to me that was almost a false notion."

"His life was at stake, and he had to defend himself, whoever his assailant might be."

"And Will Stokes, too! to whom he had been so good. Another person would have dismissed him long before, for his bad conduct."

"He was a bad fellow at heart, no doubt. But when Askham, speaking of another, told the story of himself, though without knowing it, revenge took possession of his mind, and all his passions centred in it. There is always danger to the person who tries to correct a vice in another, should the latter be evil-minded. Will Stokes gave one the idea of a malicious man; he never had a pleasant expression of face; his brows were knit, and his black eyes seemed sunk beneath them."

"It was always said he was such a handsome man."

“He was a fine grown man, and that often takes precedence of a handsome face, which you, as a woman, my dear, would think of first. He was a perfect athlete in strength and suppleness of limb; a graceful wrestler, and good in all trials of strength. Jack Downes was very nearly his match; and, as the people said at the time of his death, there were none to compete with him save the Squire and Jack Downes. I remember at the inquest how indignant his wife was at Eam Greenwood being suspected of the act. She was proud of his credit as a wrestler, and declared that none but the Squire would be able to master him.” Then in an undertone he added: “I wonder these words never struck me before, although the idea of his attacking Askham never entered my head.”

“But, Alan, everybody thought the injuries Mr. Askham received were solely owing to the blows from the tree.”

“His excessive anxiety too, to be present at the inquest: that might have struck me.”

“What did you think of it at the time?”

“What everybody else did: that it was a

fancy not worth a thought, and wholly impracticable in his state—I speak of his wish to attend the inquest. He could not move, he could not stand up, and was ready to faint if touched. He was in a very pitiable state indeed. He did not even seem to understand all that was said to him; ‘my head, my head,’ were chiefly his words. Except for the hat, his skull must have been broken by that terrible stick. His own surmise of the reason he was not killed on the spot is probably the right one.”

“What was it? I did not hear that.”

“That Will Stokes probably stumbled in his hurry to commit the deed, so that the stick slipped, knocking the hat forward over his eyes, and the force of the blow fell on the shoulder.”

“Such a murderous attack is dreadful to think of. Do not let us talk of it any more.”

“No. And here we are at home. Well, girls,” he inquired of his daughters who stood at the door, “how have you been amusing yourselves?”

“Very badly, papa,” said Jane, the younger

of the two, who was generally the spokeswoman. "We have waited for you and mamma so anxiously, and want to know what you did at the Hall. What a long time you have been gone. We saw the Miss Cavendishes pass just after you left. And Mr. Royle driving along, sitting bolt upright with his arms stretched out, as if he had never driven before, and was afraid." And both the girls laughed.

"Hush!" said their mother. "I will not have you laugh at people and criticise them."

"But, mamma! who can help laughing? He is so conceited," returned Elizabeth.

"And he thinks so much of himself," added Jane.

"Enough, enough," rejoined their mother. "I will not allow this. It is a bad and unlady-like habit to get into. Now tell me what have you both been about?"

"Well, mamma," said Jane, "Tom Cavendish has been here."

"Tom Cavendish? His aunts did not tell me he was with them."

"No, mamma, they did not know it. He

came by the mail-coach which passes their gate about noon. He found they were all out, so he came here."

"Well?"

"And he says he shall come again to-morrow to see you and papa." Jane held all the conversation whilst her sister was training some jessamine at the window.

"Then you made him welcome."

"Oh yes, we were so glad to see him, but he would not have any luncheon."

Mr. and Mrs. Dale had not been at home long before four persons, walking two and two, came up to the back-door and asked to see the Rector. They were Mary Bowes and her husband, and Eam Greenwood and his wife, Greenwood carrying a large parcel.

"Why," said the cook, looking inquiringly at him; "why, Eam Greenwood, is that you?"

"Yes, ma'am, it be oi."

"Why, we've never seen you since you were here before, a long time ago."

"No, ma'am, I never comes here"—

The conversation was stopped by a message

from Mr. Dale desiring they should be shown into the library.

The preliminary bows and curtseys having been gone though, Jim Bowes came forward and said :

"Please, sir, Eam Greenwood wants to see you, sir, pertickler."

"What is it, Eam, that you want?"

Then with much shy confusion and pulling his hair, Eam at last said :

"I ax yer pardon, sir, for troubling you, but I took the liberty to bring a small bit of our work to you."

"Mrs. Dale understands that so much better than I do, I had better send for her."

"Please, sir," he answered.

Mr. Dale rang the bell and desired Mrs. Dale might be asked to come to him.

"And how are your father and mother, Eam?"

"Sprightly, thank ye, sir; and I take it you and the missis be sharp too, for ye look as well as ever I seed you."

Mrs. Dale entered the room.

"Your servant, ma'am," said they all. And

Eam continued: "I've brought you and Mr. Dale a bit of our work."

"I shall be very glad to see it," she replied.

"Well, ma'am, you shall see it fust, and then if you like it, I hope——"

"Put the parcel on this table," said Mr. Dale; and Eam, opening out the parcel on the table, brought out first a roll of what he called "kersey"—excellent woollen stuff. Mrs. Dale admired it very much, it was so good and well-made. Next he unfolded a large tablecloth that shone like satin, and laid it on the floor; it reached nearly to the end of the room.

"This is beautiful," said Mrs. Dale, examining it.

"I'm glad you like it, ma'am," he said.

"Surely this cloth is not so old as the date on it—1662?" asked the Rector.

Eam was busy unpacking some other cloth.

"No, sir," he answered turning round, "that cloth was not finished for a month after, but our people added a piece on to the pattern, as you see, just a narrow piece for the date that it should be finished, but that faither's great-grand-

faither hurted his arm, and so he put the year and a great C and a crown, for the joy that the King was come back."

"Who do you mean by 'our people'?"

"Faither's great-grandfaither, sir, and his people; they lived in our house, and wrought the same as we."

"What is the story of the pattern of it?" asked Mrs. Dale.

"Ye see, ma'am, it's Faither Abram sending away Hagar and Ishmul into the wilderness. Here's the trees, and the sun shining. Here's they. He's pointing out the way to 'em, and there's the wilderness with rocks and mountains, and the moon and stars. Faither used to tell we, when us weer childer, it wus sunshine in the morning when he telt 'em to go, and it wur night before they got there, as the moon and stars tells."

The figures, trees, rocks, and mountains were all the same height. The figures, those of peasants of the date of the cloth. Abraham and Ishmael in broad-brimmed hats, long coats, knee-breeches, shoes and buckles. Hagar in a

short petticoat, jacket, and cap, and shoes and buckles. She carrying a large round loaf in her arms, her apron held up near her face. The boy carrying a huge pitcher.

“ This is a wonderful piece of weaving,” said Mrs. Dale ; “ can you do any like it now ? ”

“ No, ma’am, we haven’t got the harness for it now.”

“ What is the harness ? ”

“ The setts, ma’am, for the pattern in the frame.”

“ Could you not get one ? ”

“ It would take a sight of time, and they never make that sort of thing now. It’s not the fashion.”

“ What beautiful flax it is made of.”

“ It’s the best foreign flax, and the more it’s washed the better it be.”

“ It is quite a curiosity.”

“ It be called so, and that’s why faither and mother sent it.” Then displaying his other piece of weaving, “ This be some of our work, ma’am ; it’s made of the best foreign flax frae Hool, too, ma’am ; it’s warp and weft the same,”

he said, passing it through his hand ; “ and will wear beautiful though it doesn’t look so fine-like, as they make it by water-power work.”

“ It is excellent,” said Mrs. Dale ; “ so even, and so beautifully fine.”

“ I b’lieve, ma’am, and sir, you’ll find it all good of its sort ; and faither, and muther, and Abie—for it’s her work too—begs the favour of your accepting of it with their humble duty and grateful wishes for your good health, sir and madam,” he said with a bow, and his wife made a curtsy, as likewise did Jim and Mary Bowes.

“ Accept of which ? ” said the Rector.

“ The three bits, please, sir,” said Eam ; “ and we’re right sorry we have no more better to offer you, sir and ma’am.”

“ But this is a most magnificent present,” said Mr. Dale. “ Now tell me all about it.”

“ Well, sir, ye see, faither and muther and Abie, and all, said it wur good of you to take me in and tender me when I wur bad after that fall and hustling I got that time I first cum here. When I got whoam, muther she set too crying on me ; faither and Abie greet too to see me cum

back. Then when I tell them all about this Woodenstow they greet sore, and when I tell'd 'em you took me and wouldn't let me go to pris'n for what I hadn't done—for you knowed I hadn't done it, didn't ye, sir?" (Mr. Dale nodded assent). "Well, sir, they said they couldn't help but send you a little reminder, just for grateful thanks to you, sir and madam, for all your goodness to me. And it's been all these years a doing, and was only finished last year, 'cos we've not been able to get such good flax as we ought, and spin it foine for ye. Besides our trade which couldn't stop. So now, sir and madam, I bringed it when I cum this time. And it's strange that it should be at the time when this Woodenstow bis'ness is cum over again. So now, sir and madam, I ask your pardon, but I hope I've not been too free and you'd not be offended, and grateful accept these three bits from faither and muther."

"Certainly; Mrs. Dale and I accept them with pleasure; it is a valuable present you have made to us, and we beg you will give our best thanks to your father and mother and sister, for

them, and the trouble they have taken, and you also are included in our thanks. We shall prize them very much. When I took you in here, my good lad, I only did what was right and proper. I never for an instant believed you had any hand in that unfortunate, misguided man's death. Nor did it ever come into my mind that it happened as it did. The man himself was solely to blame; Mr. Askham acted in self-defence."

"Why, sir," said Eam, coming forward with his arms in fighting position, "if so be a feller cum behind you to crack your skull with a big stick, you maun strike out to give one too, and he couldn't see where it was, and t'other lay there after. Why, sir, it's as nat'ral as could be, and he'd no need to help he up, as was going to murder he. Yes, sir, I'll tell faither and muther the story when Susie and me goes back." Then turning to Mrs. Dale, he said, "Oh, I'd a'most forgot to tell ye, madam, as muther said she hoped you'd forgive the tablecloth not being quite new. It's been used too, madam, axing your pardon."

"Oh, when was it used?" asked Mrs. Dale.

"It wur never used many times, but only at weddings. Our people don't have them things only for curiosity and weddings."

"It is really a curiosity, and a valuable one to me ; the more so as it has been used for the happy occasions of weddings. I shall use it the first wedding we have, tell] your father and mother ; and tell them how pleased we are with their gifts and their good work ; and how much we thank them for them, and you also."

"I thank ye kindly, ma'am, and Mr. Dale ;" said Mary Bowes with a curtesy, "for your kind words to our lad, who is as good a lad as ever be."

"Yes," added Jim, "a right good lad, and Susan says so too ; don't ye, Susan ?"

Eam looked and smiled at his little wife. "Aye, she do say so, times and times ; and she say she do like Yarksheer, sir, most as well as I."

"I am very glad to hear it ; and now," said Mrs. Dale, "we must finish the day well. It is about time for tea in the kitchen ; you will all go in there and have some with our servants, and amuse yourselves."

“And stay to supper,” said Mr. Dale; “and after supper you shall all go home in the cart, for it is a long way for you to walk.”

“Hooray! three cheers for the Master and the Missis,” said Eam, waving his hand and stepping forward. Mary Bowes stopped him, saying:

“Hush, Eam; you’re quite aside yourself with the goodness of the gentlefolks. Thank ye kindly, sir and madam,” she said, “and I hope you’ll forgive this puir lad who doesn’t mean no harm.”

The “lad” was nearer forty than thirty, and as shrewd a man of business as any in his line; but with his light-heartedness he was still a “puir lad” to Mary.

Mr. Dale then dismissed them, and the clatter of tongues was heard in the kitchen till the Sleamoor party left in the cart, when Eam could no longer restrain his cheers, and was joined by Jim Bowes “for company’s sake.”

CHAPTER XXI.

MRS. PAGE VISITS WOODNASTON.

MR. DALE had claimed a visit from his sister Charlotte. He said, that after the essential service her letters had been to them in their researches, and the interest she had taken in all pertaining to the lady whom she had formerly known, it was but right that she should come to see and hear all that was at Woodnaston. He wanted her to come to the opening of the buildings, but family matters prevented that; so she accepted a later invitation.

The Askham family had been in deep sorrow, as we have seen; and her coming had therefore been delayed.

She came alone, her husband not being able to leave home at the time.

“My dear Charlotte!” said Mr. Dale, when they met, “what a size you have grown!”

Mrs. Page laughed. "I can repay the compliment," she said. "But you all look so well."

Mrs. Page was indeed altered in the change from the thin figure of her younger days to her present condition; she was a short woman, and now nearly as broad as she was long!

Days passed rapidly and happily away. Mrs. Page had never been to Woodnaston before, but she had heard so much about it one way and another, especially as regarded the inquiries about the Lady Ann, that she was prepared to be interested, and was also a little astonished at what she heard. She said she could scarcely imagine the story of "Mother Pendle" having any reference to that *true* lady by birth and manners, the Lady Ann of former days!

Lucy was especially delighted to hear her speak on the subject. The whole story was so new to her; she had never heard "Mother Pendle" mentioned till lately, and could hardly believe in its reality. She wished she could remember her; for of course she had often seen her when she was a little child. But the old lady had passed so quietly away, that she was

little remembered when she was gone, even by those who had known her.

“I am sure,” said Lucy to Mrs. Page, “I should have gone to her and made friends with her if I had been old enough.”

“You would have done nothing of the sort, my dear,” answered Mrs. Page. “There was a distance and pride in her manner that kept her clear of all intimacy, especially, latterly, with those of her own class in life. In her young days it was so with every one; beyond a certain point, no one was familiar with her; she was even distant with my mother, whom she always called her dearest friend, yet, with the contradiction so often found in people’s characters, she condescended to marry beneath her.”

“Then I should not have cared for her.”

“Yes, you would. People of all classes were gratified by her notice, although her manner might be repellant at first. My father was perfectly aware of this fault, as he considered it, yet admired her excessively; not for her beauty, for she was not good-looking, but for her courtly manners.”

It was arranged that some Saturday afternoon—always a sort of half-holiday—all who liked to attend, should assemble in the garden-court of the buildings, and there hear read or related, portions of the memoirs of the Lady Ann. It was beautiful summer weather, and it would be more pleasant to be out on the lawn than in a house. So on the day fixed, Mr. Dale and Mrs. Page undertook the arrangement and the reading, which was necessarily much curtailed from the MSS.; and it was considered there would be more sense of reality in the history if Mrs. Page spoke of her recollections of Becklea and Eddishowe.

We should describe Mrs. Page as a remarkably young-looking woman; fat, fair, and over fifty years of age—and a grandmother—but full of life and spirit; fond of talking, and as we have seen by her letters in a former part of our story, possessed of an excellent memory. Lucy was quite fascinated with her; she declared the words, “Bid me discourse, I will enchant thine ear,” were completely applicable to her.

“Stop there,” interposed Mrs. Page, “for I am no ‘fairy’ to ‘trip upon the green.’”

“But you have ‘light and flowing hair,’ ” said Lucy, as they jokingly talked together.

In speaking, words flowed in a continuous stream of soft tones from her mouth. She had a remarkably agreeable voice, which though not loud could be well heard at a distance, from the distinctness of her enunciation. She was often asked to sing, even pressed to sing—people were sure “she must sing beautifully”—but she had no voice for singing; her forte was speaking, and the modulations of her voice were perfect.

A number of the villagers and gentry had assembled in the garden-court; benches and chairs were arranged on the lawn, and all, seated round, were listening to Mr. Dale’s preliminary discourses. But the weather suddenly changed; the sunshine had become clouded over, and a few drops of rain came down. Soon they fell fast, the wind rose, and a storm seemed imminent; some indeed declaring they heard distant thunder, but that proved to be only imagination. A general rush was made to the common hall of the Hospital, the benches and chairs were

carried in, and all was arranged anew for the reading in a very short time.

Mrs. Page said she was glad of the change ; for having spoken a few words whilst they were on the green, she found it too great an exertion, that she was sure she could not have continued speaking there for many minutes together.

Mr. Dale gave a short account of the family of Miss Thurlestane, as he said he should call her.

Mr. Royle interrupted him, saying, "I did not understand the other day, why being only Miss Thurlestane she took the name of 'My Lady Ann.'"

"That," said Mrs. Page, "was in accordance with the custom of the time when she was young—I mean her unmarried life. She did not assume it of herself, but it was given her by courtesy by others, as a member of a noble family."

"Did she call herself so?"

"I do not know ; but she resented being called by any other name."

“She was always fond of an *alias*, I suppose,” he said with a contemptuous look.

“I think we may let the dead rest in their graves, and not put false notions as belonging to them,” replied Mrs. Page gravely.

“But we are here to hear her history, and it is as well to know all points of it,” said Mr. Royle.

Murmurs were heard, and Ladds, the carpenter, who had no love for Mr. Royle, said, “I think, sir, it will be more interesting to hear Mr. Dale and Mrs. Page tell the story their own way; she knew the lady and you didn’t.”

“Oh certainly,” said Mr. Royle.

Next, Mrs. Page gave an account of Becklea House and Park, and their beauties.

“And,” she said, “you may judge how horrified we were, when we went to take a last look at the dear old place, to find parts of it already almost in ruins through the neglect of the two last Earls. The thatch of the dairy hung in shreds, and was full of holes where mice and birds had made their nests; inside, the white marble slabs were discoloured; the little that was left of the

fine old china bowls and dishes broken or cracked ; the marble fountain broken ; the Dutch tiles round the walls and on the floor, cracked or come out of their places ! The dairy in the former Earls' time was quite a show place ; all the visitors were taken to see it. The coloured glass in the windows had been broken and replaced with common glass, and the door was broken and off its hinges. It was a complete wreck. Also the cellars—another show place—where the great double hogsheads stood ; they were of varnished oak with gilt tires, and the name of one of the Earl's sons painted in black and gold on each. They were tapped in succession, and refilled with strong ale each season as they became empty. But they were never refilled after the death of Earl Oswy, the father of the last two Earls ; they had fallen to pieces for want of use, and there were some of the staves lying about like the bones of giants, whilst the greater part of the grand old barrels had been used as fire-wood, the old servant declaring they were so hard she could scarcely chop them up ! The home farm was in nearly as ruinous a state ; the

farm-house and buildings not having been repaired for years. The white roses in the gardens were the only things that flourished. The rest of the gardens were left uncultivated, and the ornamental yews were grown out of all form for want of clipping. Oh, we were grieved to see it! The house felt and smelt damp and close for want of being aired and inhabited. Myriads of moths flew about the rooms, and the old servant who lived there said the carpets and tapestries were full of them, from being left rolled up so many years. The ivy had penetrated the window-frames and was putting out long shoots over the walls of some of the rooms, and hung in streamers from the picture-frames. We heard that when the floors of the drawing-rooms were taken up there was a complete network of ivy roots and trailing branches tangled together under the boards, the branches stretching forward without putting forth leaves, to try to reach the light; and one or two had penetrated the wall of a room on the opposite side and were in leaf. We examined them closely; it was a curious and melancholy sight."

Mr. Dale asked, "Do you know, Charlotte, what became of all the pictures?"

"They were all taken away, we heard, to London, with the rest of the furniture and effects. Nothing was sold in Yorkshire."

"Was nothing offered to the last survivor of the family—Mrs. John Lystone, she was then?"

"I did not hear so; and I should think not; for the Earl's creditors declared when all was sold—the plate and family jewels included—there was not enough to pay all his debts. But to continue—The fine stone bridge over the stream which ran through the grounds alone retained its beauty, along with the shrubs and evergreens beside the murmuring stream it spanned, and remained to mark where the pleasure-grounds once were."

"They are gone now," said Mrs. Askham. "Lucy and I went there to try and find the almshouses; but they had been partly destroyed and altered, and the bridge was gone."

"I am sorry to hear it. In that stream, Alan, we used to fish. Do you remember how happy we used to be there in our summer

holidays? The kind old Earl coming to see how we got on, and sending us fruit from the garden?"

"No," said Mr. Dale. "I cannot say I do. But, then, recollect what a very little boy I was."

"Ah, yes. And we never went there after the old Earl's death."

"Do you recollect the dress of the old alms-house women?"

"Scarcely. I remember red cloaks and black bonnets of a large size; but I could not describe them. I did not often see them, and they were not particularly noticeable to me, for all the old women wore red cloaks and black bonnets."

"What do you remember of the Lady Ann personally?"

"I remember her very well as a young woman, and soon after her marriage. But later than that I never saw her, nor did any of us; for after her father's death she never came to Eddishowe."

"Lucy and I went to Eddishowe also," said Mrs. Askham, "and found the church had

been almost entirely destroyed by fire ; and the Rectory was being altered and added to, so little trace of the original remained, which we much regretted."

"Did you ever see John Lystone?"

"No. I suppose the night he came to carry her away from her father's house was the only time he ever was there ; for Mr. Thurlestane would not admit him within his door, nor hear his name mentioned. So secret was everything kept, that for a long time no one knew with whom she had run off."

"Do you know where she made his acquaintance?"

"No, we never heard ; even her step-mother would never mention the subject if she could avoid it."

"Was she nice-looking when she was young?"

"Her face was plain ; she had a very large mouth, and a pointed chin. She had the fine glossy brown hair and dark grey eyes of the Thurlestanes ; she had a long neck, and we used to admire her falling shoulders. She had a good figure, and beautiful little hands and feet."

"Are these like her?" said Mr. Askham, producing Colonel Llewellyn's sketch, and the ring miniature.

"Yes — the one in pencil is the most like; the other is, as far as I recollect, a little flattered. But I remember that pearl necklace; she almost always wore it."

"I can show it to you," said Mrs. Askham. "She left it to me, with many other things. Lucy, give me that box." And out of the box she took the pearl necklace with the diamond cross.

Every one wished to see, and it was handed round.

"To think of that little body wearing this!" said Sally Giles.

"There was a ring too, that she was never seen without. It was a large forefinger ring, with her mother's light hair plaited in it, and set round with small diamonds."

"Is this it?" asked Mrs. Askham.

"Oh yes. How well I remember it."

"Can you remember any other ornaments she wore?"

“She had a great many both from her mother and her grandmother, the last Countess of Becklea. She wore them all by turns when she went to parties, and was always magnificently dressed. We used to think she wore too many jewels for an unmarried girl; but my father, who never would allow she was wrong, said, ‘When she had them, why should she not wear them? They suited her rank in life.’”

“And were all these costly jewels in the hut?” asked Mr. Royle.

“No,” replied Mr. Askham, “they were sent by her to the care of her lawyer, who kept them for years, not knowing what the parcel contained.”

“Then it would have been no use to dig for treasure in or near her hut,” said Mr. Royle.

“Not the least,” answered Mr. Dale, “she never buried anything.”

“But she was considered a miser,” said Mr. Royle.

“I confess,” said Mr. Askham, “I did think she was one, myself, till I found by her memorandums that it was to keep herself unknown that she retained her money about her, fearing

that any communication might lead to her being discovered and again robbed by her husband's brother, Tom Lystone."

"Ah, yes," said Mr. Royle, "that's the name of the rascal we heard of in York, that nobody would trust with sixpence for half an hour."

"Well, it's an unkimmon putty story, and looks like a fairy tale," said Farmer Giles. "And to think of that little old lady body, as used to make her own cakes, and washed her own clo'es, having all them grand things!" he added, after he had been looking at the jewels.

"She left me a magnificent ring, with a kindly message," said Miss Cavendish.

"She left us two beautiful rings," said Mrs. Dale.

"And she left me a most valuable edition of Chaucer," added Mr. Dale.

"And she left me a unkimmon cu'rous creetur as runs about all of heself like nothing in the world," said Farmer Giles, "and we'll kep it for her sake, puir body, though she wur a ledly, and God bless her, in His mercy."

"I think, sir," said Mr. Royle to Mr. Askham,

“considering all things, that there should be a proper tablet to her memory put up in the church, giving her birth, marriage, &c.; for by these buildings she has become a sort of public person, and a great benefactress.”

“I think so too, and there shall be one. Colonel Llewellyn, whose death we all lament, was to have written one out; but he could not please himself as to the wording of it. He could not, he said, write anything sufficiently appropriate for one whom he had so sincerely loved all his life. He wrote many and many only to be destroyed immediately. He wished to shield her memory from animadversion, or reproach of any sort. He could not bear the idea of her name being coupled with such people as the Lystones. Yet how to avoid it? Her having been legally married to John Lystone was the point which could not be got over. I think, however, now, all will understand her position, and no unfair censure or reproof of any kind will be cast in future upon the memory of a lady who has, as Mr. Royle remarks, been so great a benefactress to the

neighbourhood. The buildings have been further endowed by legacies from Colonel Llewellyn; the land which she left for their endowment is becoming more and more valuable, so that nothing will be wanting to make them successful."

"Hear, hear," resounded on all sides, led by Mr. Royle.

Sally Giles was crying and sniffing, with her husband's handkerchief to her face. "To think," she cried, "that puir dear leddy did all her washing and everything herself! I ought to have knowed better nor to let her do it. I knowed she wur better than the likes o' we. I knowed it. I all'ays told Giles so."

"And she fully appreciated all your kind attention to her, Sally," said Mr. Askham, "and that of everybody else. I will read you what she says, which could not have been written very long before she died."

After Mr. Askham had read it, there was a general murmur of, "She was a good lady, and we're very sorry for her."

One of the young men said, "I was one of

those boys who teased her, and called her a witch. I see a few more here who did the same; I'm very sorry I behaved so rude, sir, Mr. Askham, and I'm sure the others do the same."

"Yes, sir," was heard from one or two places.

"Your conduct was bad," said Mr. Askham, "disgraceful—whether the person you insulted were a lady or not. But in her case it proved a benefit to her, which you in no way intended. She felt that it gave her a security from intrusion; no one went to her cottage to alarm her. The name of a witch frightened others away, but there was nothing in it to alarm her. She mentions it in her journal, and pities your ignorance."

The rain, which had come down in torrents, now subsided into a gentle shower; it was getting late, and the assembly broke up. Mr. Royle proposed a vote of thanks to Mr. Askham, Mrs. Page, and Mr. Dale, which was responded to unanimously with cheers, and then all took their departure.

"We'll think of her, puir leddy, with grateful hearts; that we will," said Farmer Giles.

"That we will," echoed the others.

CHAPTER XXII.

NEWS FROM INDIA.

OF all Mr. Askham's children, Lucy was the only one at home. And hers would not be a long sojourn under the paternal roof, for on his return from India, she was to be married to Sir Gerard Norman. Often would her father say to her, "Lucy, Lucy; why will you leave me?"

"Dear papa!" she sadly answered.

"It is so hard to lose all one's children."

"I shall not be far off."

"Still you will not be here."

"I can come to you, and mamma and you can come to Culdoover whenever you like."

"It is a long journey."

"Only in the next county."

"When will that fellow Gerard be back?"

"Oh papa, do not speak so of him."

"It is only when I think of his carrying you off that I feel spiteful towards him."

"You used to like him," she said, kneeling down beside him and taking his hand.

"Well, I suppose I do now," he answered, smiling at her serious look.

"You used to call him another son."

"I should feel he was, if he would come and live here."

"That would be very nice. But how could he do so, with Culdover to look after?"

"Suggest to him that he should let it."

"He says it has already been too long without a resident owner."

"So it has—he is right there. But the pity is he ever had it, if in that case I am to lose my only remaining child."

"Oh George, how selfish you are," said his wife, "and Lucy is not your only child. Remember the others."

"I seldom see them. Georgie is always on the tramp with her husband. Mary is shut up in a murky street in London with Jeff. What a dull life it must be for her!"

“Not at all, George.”

“Well! women must be the best creatures on earth to put up with the lives their husbands lead them. Only fancy what our two girls have chosen for their lot!”

“They have very good husbands, papa.”

“No doubt they have. But what comfort can Georgie, for instance, have in her constant changes of abode, often in the most unpleasant quarters—in wretched lodgings—and young children to provide for.”

“I know no one so fitted to her lot as Georgie,” said his wife. “Charles Stapylton says that under no circumstance does she ever complain, nor does he see anything but a smile on her face, or hear any but cheerful words from her mouth. ‘Compensation,’ as she calls it, she finds everywhere; and he said that in one very bad place, on the march in Ireland, the only thing that even *she* could find as compensation was, that there was very good honey to be got there!”

“Then, remember, mamma, what an excellent man-of-all-work she has in Lawrence, who takes all trouble off her hands.”

“She is as happy as she can be,” said Mrs. Askham, “and she always has her society amongst the officers’ wives, with her.”

“Well, we have disposed of Georgie, though I fail to see the charms of her existence. Now, look at Mary—the child who loved the country and all its pursuits.”

“But she loves Jeff better,” interposed his wife.

“Supposing she does. Just consider her life, pent up in that dismal Square, amongst the Inns of Court!”

“Queen Square? Why it is a very good Square, and has charming houses.”

“Granted again, Louisa; still—what a life for her during the many hours she is left alone there of a day! Jeff so hard-worked—no garden, but the poor smoke-dried enclosure in front of her windows and the smallest modicum of ground to the back of the house. No birds, save the poor little smoky asthmatic sparrows and chaffinches that hop wearily about in those dreary gardens—no fields, no woods. How often she must sigh for the country and her old haunts at Woodnaston.”

“I doubt it,” said his wife.

“She did say, mamma, she often wished she could get into the country,” observed Lucy, as she walked to the window ; on reaching which she exclaimed : “Who can that man be?—It is the new carrier—he does not know his way to the back door, and he is carrying a very large parcel, which seems heavy.”

“He will find his way,” said her father, and continued the conversation. “I do not pretend to know much about London and its suburbs ; it is much altered, I am told, since I was there for any time ; but I remember as pretty scenery as one could wish to have, about Hampstead and Hornsey, though it was a long way to get there, and certainly the immediate suburbs were not in either case inviting.”

“Dear me !” said his wife, “what pleasure would it be to Mary to go there or anywhere alone? She is much happier at home, you may depend. Oh ! if she had but a child ! That would be her delight, and a companion for her in Jeff’s absence.”

“If you please, Miss,” said the footman,

bringing a large package to Lucy, "the carrier has brought this for you; and there is 7s. 6d. to pay."

"Tell Thwaites to pay it," said Mr. Askham. "So the heavy parcel is for you after all, Lucy."

"Yes, papa. I cannot think who it is from."

"Let me see it. It is the writing of a clerk. Open it, John. Go and fetch the tools."

The parcel—it was a box—was soon divested of its outer cover, and on it was painted an address, adding that it was sent by the 'Kent' East Indiaman, Captain Blower, and consigned to the care of Messrs. Hobb and Nobb, London.

"I wonder how they knew my address here?" said Lucy.

"We shall find a letter somewhere," said her mother.

"No," said Mr. Askham, "the letter will come by post."

So the box was opened, and all sorts of pretty things were in it, but not a scrap of writing was to be found. "Of course, Lucy," said her father, "they come from Norman."

She had to wait till the next morning before she received her letters. She then had two; one from Messrs. Hobb and Nobb, saying they had despatched the box consigned to them from Calcutta, and that the freight and duty had been settled according to arrangement with the captain of the vessel. The other was from Sir Gerard Norman. He said he had sent a curious Indian dagger to her father, a shawl to her mother, one for Mrs. Lewis, one for herself, and he begged her acceptance also of the other trifles. Lucy was much pleased to find by the letter that he was to be home by the next vessel, for on his arrival in India he found that the Major, whom he was to buy out, had succumbed to fever after a few hours' illness, just a fortnight before his arrival. He had therefore got his promotion without purchase. He would quit the service after three months, and the purchase money that would be paid by his successor for the Majority, he should pay to the late Major's widow, who would under other circumstances have had it from him, and was left in bad circumstances. Lucy was pleased

with this arrangement, and with the thought of his early return.

“At any rate, Lucy,” said her father, “he cannot be here till the spring of next year.”

“He says they had a fine passage out, of only six months, papa.”

“That is quite a chance. He may be nearer eight months coming back. ‘The good West wind’ they talk of in going round the Cape when going to India, may be a bad West wind in coming home.”

“Oh, papa, we will hope it will not.”

“So we will, Lucy ; we will hope for the best, and a speedy return,” said her mother.

“Lucy, Lucy, why will you leave us ?” said her father.

Mr. Askham’s recovery was quick, and brought with it an improvement in mind and body that made almost another man of him. He told his old friend, the Doctor, that though the pain in arm and hand was still occasionally felt, the weight that had been removed from his mind made life bearable. He no longer suffered

from the absent fits which before had been a torture to himself and to his friends.

This serenity of disposition increased when, the necessary formalities having been gone through, his innocence of any act beyond justifiable self-defence was made as clear to the world, as it had been, on his simple confession, to his friends and neighbours. He acknowledged, with thankfulness, the singularity of the fact that he should have been kept from telling his story till the time when it was possible to have one of the most important witnesses, David Wads, present.

And so the strange story of the death of Will Stokes became buried in the past. It is true that a certain peculiar gentleness towards the children of the dead man, when he met them, marked the demeanour of the one whose hand had unintentionally given the fatal blow ; but Mr. Askham had other interests to absorb his thoughts and lighten his spirits in the generation that has grown up around him since our story began.

Lucy's marriage was to take place as soon as

Sir Gerard Norman returned from India ; and Elizabeth Dale was soon to marry her old play-fellow, Tom Cavendish. And so we leave them, with the good wishes of all their friends.

THE END.

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